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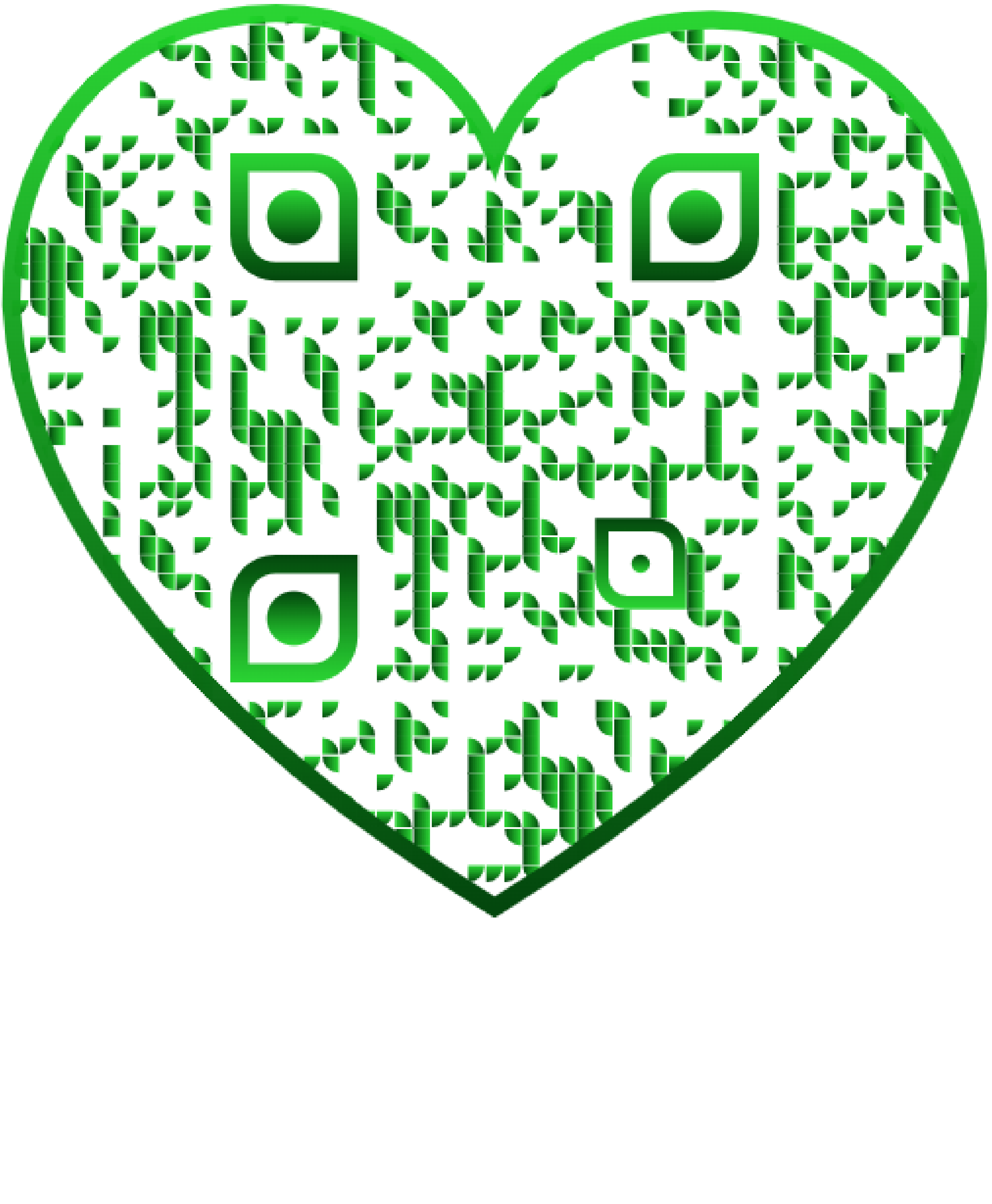

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THE ROOT NOTE

It's with no small amount of pride (and some trepidation) that I sit down to write this, the first of my editor's letters. I'm delighted to be given the opportunity to helm this wonderful magazine and cover all the gear and musicians that fall under the umbrella of *Acoustic*. I'd like to take this opportunity to pass on my thanks to Steve Harvey, who did a fantastic job over the last year, and reassure him that I'll try my hardest not to undo all his good work.

I think we've got off to a cracking start here, though. Benjamin Francis Leftwich is not only a fantastic songwriter and guitarist, but he's somebody who has a real story to tell, which made him the perfect choice for the front cover. As you'll read in his interview (on page 34), after a dream start to his career as a musician, he called time on performing and touring after his father, the noted academic Adrian Leftwich, died in 2013. But he returned earlier this year with a heartfelt letter to his fans and the promise of a new album, which will be out as you read this. It's an emotionally powerful record, but not a maudlin one, and I certainly think it'll propel him back into the spotlight.

Erstwhile editor Harvey hasn't left us entirely either. Just before he left he bagged himself an interview with Ricky Gervais – without offering the opportunity to any of his staff writers or long-suffering assistant ed, I might add – and the result of that day's 'work' starts on page 26. The two of them have a right old natter about resurrecting the character of David Brent, Gervais' real love of vintage guitars and the art of writing a good bad song.

Unfortunately that was a skill that I never mastered. Instead I've spent much of my life simply writing bad songs, but always with an acoustic in hand. I was lucky enough to start playing the guitar just as people were beginning to take advantage of the internet's potential to teach. That meant plenty of frustrating evenings learning songs from wholly inaccurate tablature and waiting days for low quality instructional videos to download while my parents disconnected the dial-up connection so they could make a phone call.

I had, up to that point, always considered learning the guitar a solitary pursuit. I was an avid reader of guitar mags, including our new sister titles *Guitarist* and *Total Guitar*, but that would often mean hours spent poring over features, gear reviews and the tuition section on my own. It was a resource that I trusted and treasured, but which I didn't feel able to share with others. I would like to think that times have changed, and the lively community the magazine has built on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram vindicates that somewhat. But I'm keen to do more.

So I'll leave you with this request: get in touch with us. Let us know what you think of what we're doing, what you want to see reviewed, who you want to see interviewed and what you want to learn in the tuition section. Or, just let us know how you're getting on in your acoustic endeavours. You can find all the relevant contact details on this page.

On this theme, I'll echo the rallying cry Steve made in the last issue: if you're coming to the London Acoustic Show on 10 September (and let's be honest, why would you not be?), make sure you get involved with Chris Woods' wonderful Guitar Revolution event. Chris has created a great piece of music that has something for players of any standard, and his instructional videos – alongside the tabs for each of the four parts – make getting involved a doddle. Just head to either the Acoustic website, the London Acoustic Show website or to Chris Woods' own site and have a look. Oh, and don't forget to bring your guitar with you.

Enjoy the issue.
Nick Robbins

Contents

ISSUE 122 SEPTEMBER 2016

Interviews

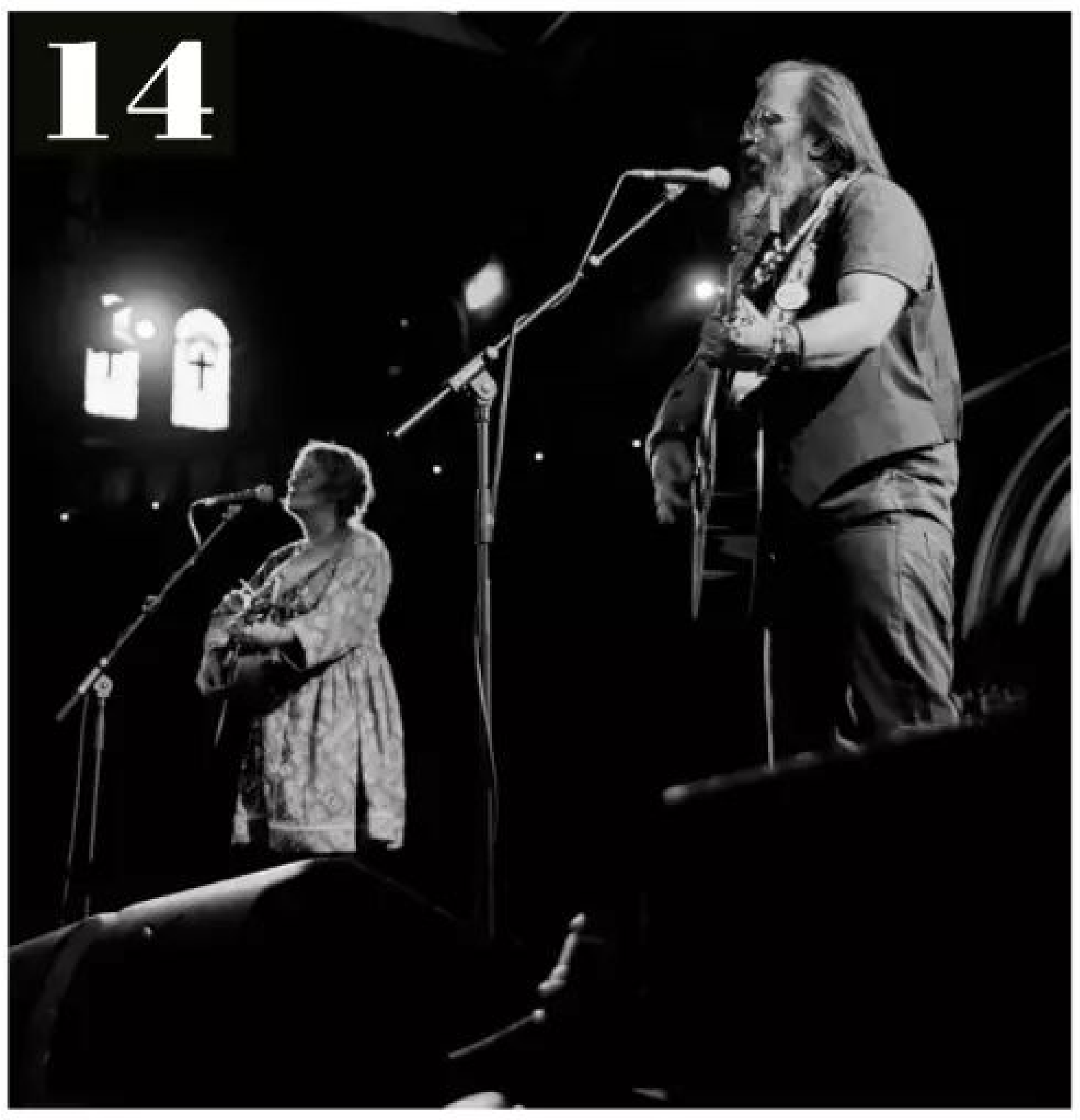
14 .... SHAWN COLVIN & STEVE EARLE

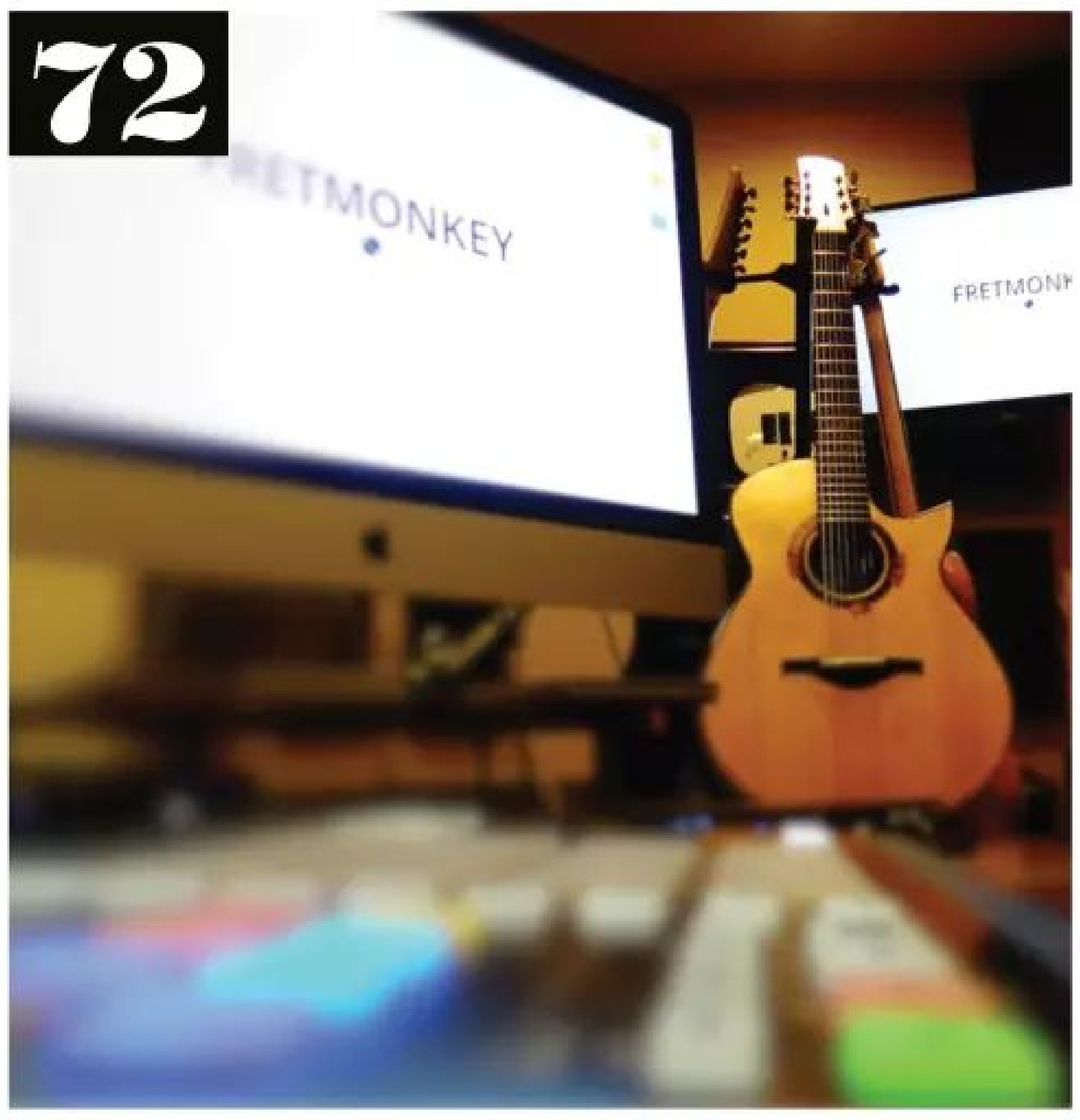
20 .... JAMIE LENMAN

26 .... RICKY GERVAIS

34 .... BENJAMIN FRANCIS LEFTWICH

43 .... JD SIMO





Features

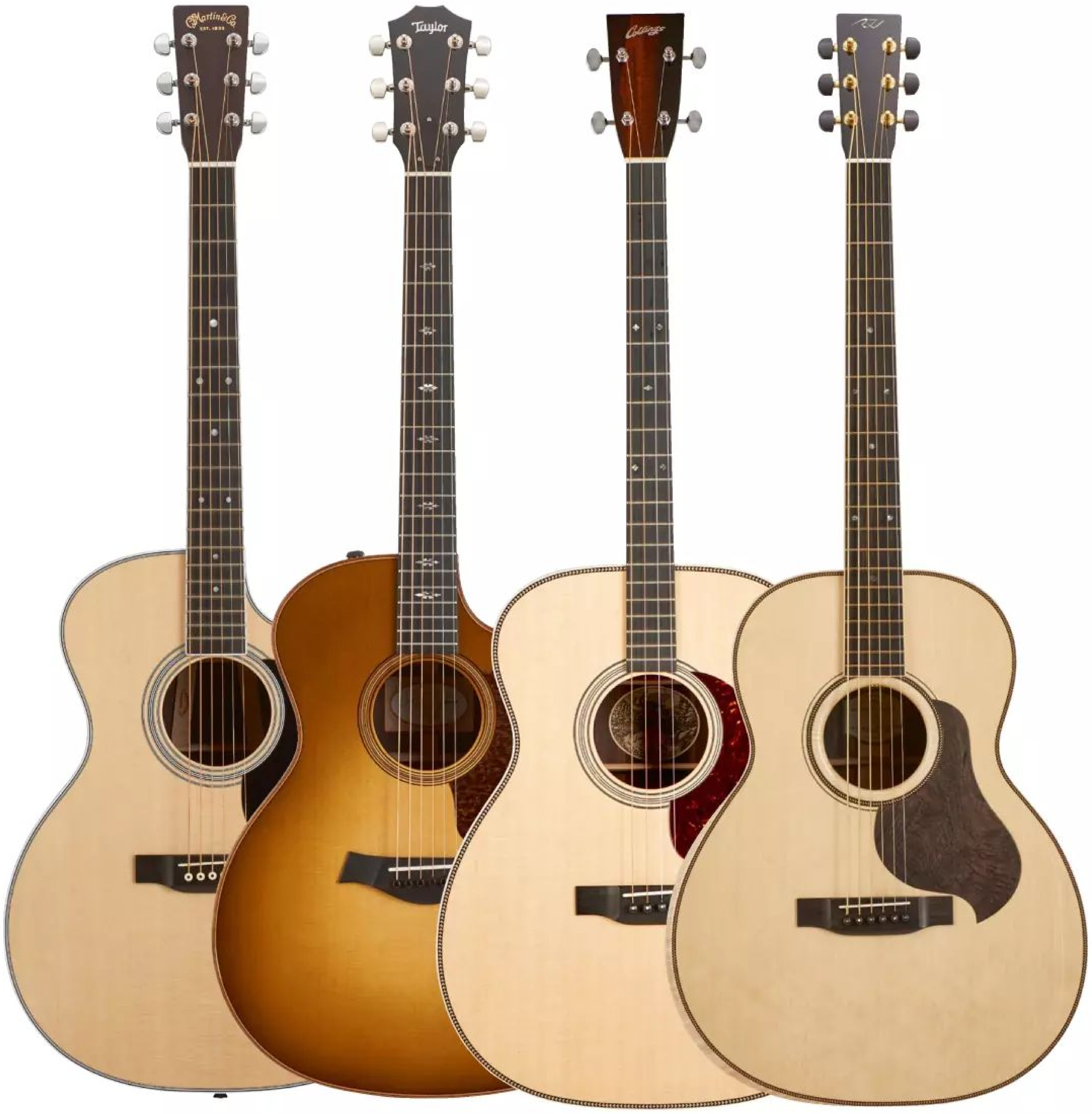
70 .... THINKING INSIDE THE BOX: NICK BENJAMIN

72 .... FEATURE: FRETMONKEY RECORDS

76 .... NEW MUSIC: RETUNE YOUR EARS

78 .... NEW MUSIC: CD REVIEWS

106 .... A FUNNY NOTE



Gear

48 .... C.F. MARTIN & CO. GPC-35E & OMC-18E

54 .... TAYLOR 714CE

60 .... COLLINGS 2H TENOR

66 .... ROZAWOOD BARITONE

Techniques

88 .... GORDON GILTRAP

90 .... CHRIS GIBBONS

92 .... CARL ORR, ROCKSCHOOL

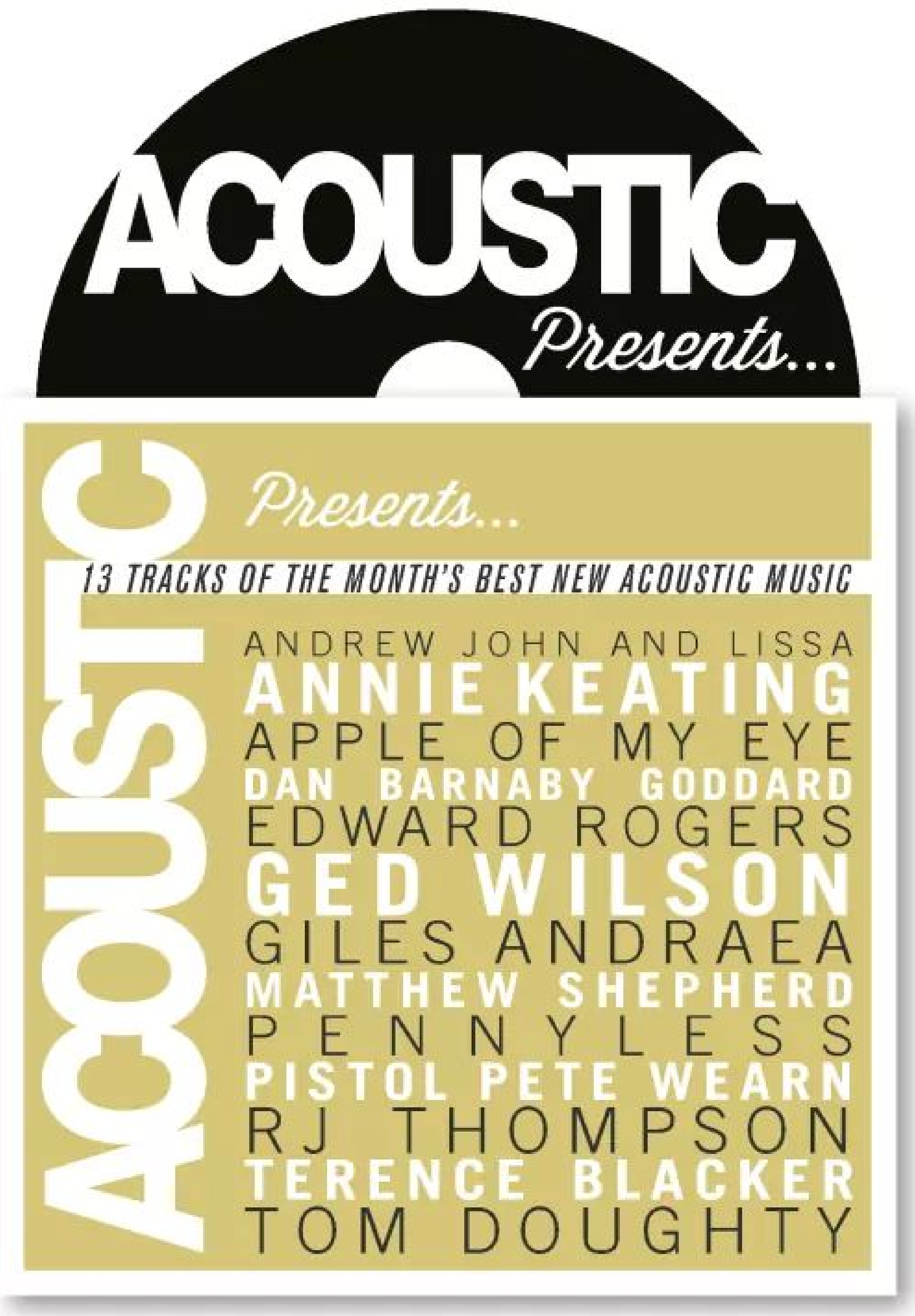
94 .... RICHARD GILEWITZ

96 .... SIMON MAYOR

98 .... MIKE DAWES

100 .... RAYMOND BURLEY

102 .... COLLECTORS' CORNER



01

ANDREW JOHN AND LISSA
'TWO LETTERS'

Andrew John and Lissa are an English and Danish duo with huge folk pedigree. The pair toured the UK with Scottish folk musician Alex Campbell and accompanied Phil Cunningham on his tour of Denmark in 1977. Andrew John and Lissa have played in venues and festivals all over the world, but mostly in New Zealand, Austria, Hungary, Holland, the UK, Belgium and Denmark.

'Two Letters' was written by Andrew John and is based on a short story by Alan Sillitoe called *Enoch's Two Letters.*

■ ***www.anyon.co***

02

ANNIE KEATING
'IN THE VALLEY'

Annie Keating's new album, *Trick Star* – her seventh full-length release – has been getting a good deal of BBC radio play, gathering praise and positive reviews. She is set to perform this year's Brooklyn Americana Music Festival in September.

For fans of Lucinda Williams, John Prine, Jason Isbell and other great alt-country songwriters, this is sun-dappled Americana at its best, sure to enchant and inspire.

■ ***www.anniekeating.com***

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06

GED WILSON
'MEET THE BOSS'

Ged Wilson is a solo acoustic contemporary blues artist, originally from Manchester but now based in Cheltenham. Ged is well known on the British blues circuit for his energetic and upbeat live performances. His blues are relevant with today and taken from the world around him. His new album, *Tonight at Noon*, showcases a variety of styles within the blues genre, always pushing the boundaries."

■ ***www.gedwilson.com***
■ ***www.facebook.com/people/Ged-Wilson/126648952***
■ ***www.twitter.com/gedwilson1***

10

PISTOL PETE WEARN
'JUST ANOTHER SINNER'

Pistol Pete Wearn is a renowned vocalist, slide guitarist, harmonica player and songwriter, who blends traditional material and originals with the odd slide-ified cover.

Recent career highlights have included being played on BBC Radio 6 Music; winning *Moonshine Magazine's* 'Solo Blues Artist of the Year' award for 2015-16; a successful five day run at the 2015 Edinburgh Fringe; a tour of Ireland; and support slots for ragtime guitar legend Stefan Grossman, American folk superstars the Stray Birds and New Orleans songwriter Andrew Duhon.

■ ***www.pistolpetewearn.co.uk***

03

APPLE OF MY EYE 'THE BEAST BELOW'

Apple of my Eye are the uproarious troubadours of London's modern folk scene. Their music blends traditional English folk with modern songwriting, using vocal harmonies and traditional instruments. They play regularly around London and are fast becoming regular highlights of the folk festivals including Secret Garden, Wilderness and headline slots at Stainsby and Exile festivals. Their new album *The Beast Below* will be released on 19 September.

- ***www.applesinlondon.com***

04

DAN BARNABY GODDARD 'STARS'

Dan Barnaby Goddard lives in Horrabridge, Devon, a village on the edge of Dartmoor, UK. Having studied Spanish at university, spending a year in Caracas (Venezuela), he began honing his skills as musician and songwriter. Learning violin from the age of six and then picking up the guitar when he was 14, he has always had an artist's passion and a poet's soul.

Firm friends with the Lakeman brothers he has also been inspired by meetings with great folk innovators such as Chris Newman, Nic Jones, and the late, great, Davey Graham.

- ***www.dbgmusic.com***

05

EDWARD ROGERS 'FADE AWAY'

Singer-songwriter Edward Rogers was born in Birmingham, England where he spent the first 12 years of his life. He moved to New York City where a subway accident in October 1985 left him without his right arm and right leg below the knee. Rogers then turned to songwriting.

Over the past decade, Rogers has released six solo albums and two with Bedsit Poets, a folk/Brit-inspired trio. *Glass Marbles* will be released in the UK on 2 September on Zip Records via Proper Music Distribution.

- ***www.edwardrogersmusic.com***
- ***www.facebook.com/edward.rogers***
- ***www.twitter.com/edwardrogers***

07

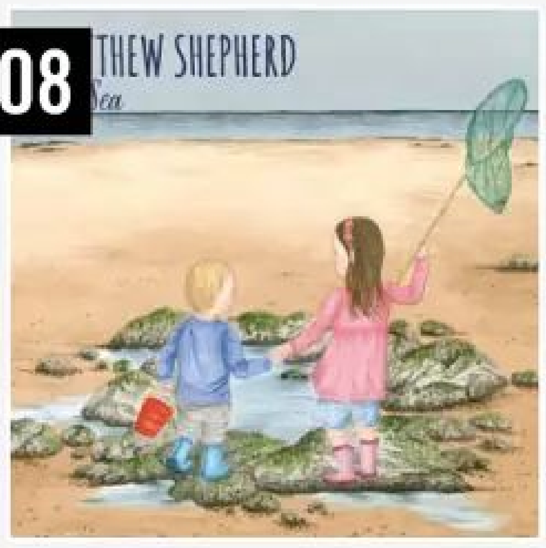
GILES ANDREAE 'SON I KNOW THE ANGELS'

Giles Andreae is a singer-songwriter based near Oxford. His songs are, for the most part, delicate, folk and country-tinged elegies to love, family and friendship.

Citing Leonard Cohen, Johnny Cash and Mary Chapin Carpenter as influences, his music unfolds through lyrically haunting, emotional landscapes and stories. Giles is the creator of stickman-poet Purple Ronnie and a best-selling children's author. His first album, *Songs From A Father*, is out now.

- ***www.gilesandreaemusic.com***
- ***www.facebook.com/gilesandreaesongs***

08

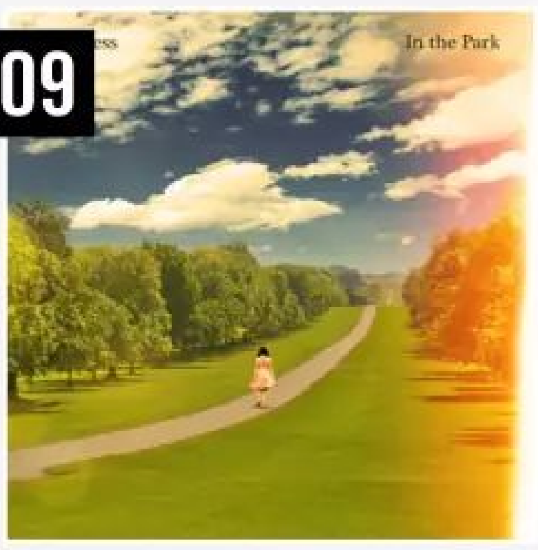


MATTHEW SHEPHERD 'THE SEA'

Matthew Shepherd is a 21-year-old singer-songwriter from Essex. His debut studio album *Top Of The Tree* was released in June 2015 and only took a day to break into the iTunes Top 100 Singer/Songwriter Album Chart. His songs cover the happiness and heartbreak of love, with his warm, intimate and delicate style. July 2016 sees the release of Matthew's Acoustic EP *The Sea*.

- ***www.facebook.com/matthewshepherdmusic***
- ***www.twitter.com/mattshep1994***

09



PENNYLESS 'DANCING WITH ANNABEL'

Pennyless has a special sound that is distinctly English, cooking up lively, quirky and downright mystical songs from folklore, medieval history and their own musical minds.

Troubadours on fiddle, flute, guitar, bass, bouzouki, whistle, bowed psaltery, saxophone and djembe, to name but a few, the instrumental arrangements are irresistibly fiery with memorable melodies and warm harmony vocals.

- ***www.pennyless-music.co.uk***
- ***www.facebook.com/pennylessfolk***
- ***www.twitter.com/pennylessduo***

11

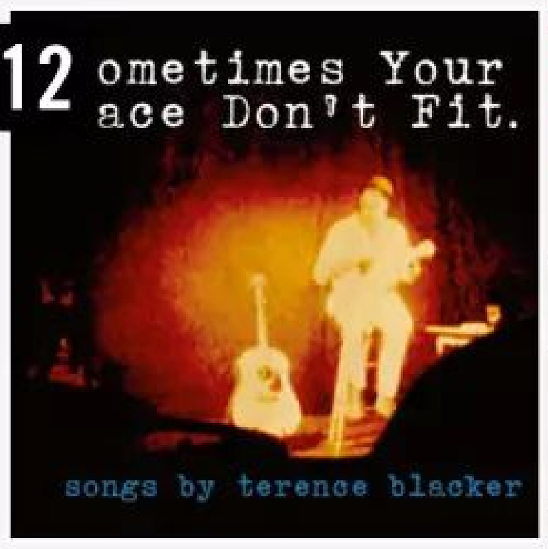
RJ THOMPSON 'CANNERY ROW'

RJ Thompson is an independent singer, songwriter and guitarist from Newcastle, England. His new album, *Live*, was released on 4 July.

From open mic nights around the North East of England, to sharing the bill with Jools Holland and Joss Stone at the Royal Albert Hall, RJ has risen to prominence in recent months. He is proudly endorsed by Lowden Guitars and Two Rock Amplification.

- ***www.rjthompsonmusic.com***
- ***www.facebook.com/rjthompsonmusic***

12



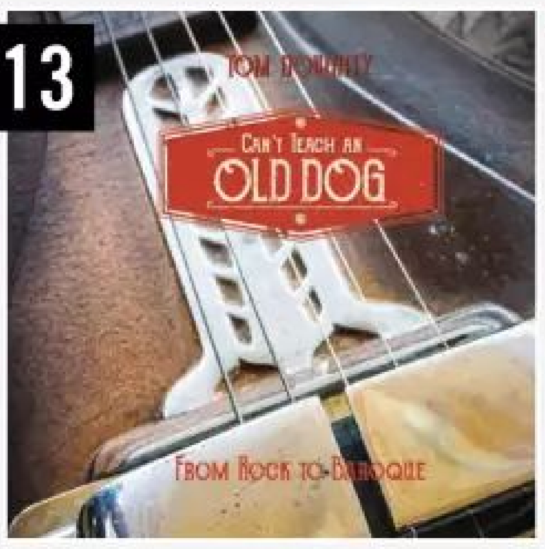
TERENCE BLACKER 'YOUNG GIRL WITH A UKULELE'

Terence Blacker is a singer-songwriter who has performed at festivals, folk clubs and concert halls across the country and in Europe. His sharp-eyed, funny and tender songs of contemporary life have drawn comparisons to the work of Jake Thackray, Georges Brassens and Tom Lehrer.

His one-man show *My Village and Other Aliens* featured at the 2013 Edinburgh Fringe and he has released two albums of his songs – *Lovely Little Games* (2012) and *Sometimes Your Face Don't Fit* (2016).

- ***www.terenceblacker.com***

13



TOM DOUGHTY 'MILKY TEA'

Tom Doughty's new album, *Can't Teach An Old Dog*, showcases his ability to seamlessly blend pop, jazz, folk, and his world music influences, along with his instantly recognisable lap steel guitar style, vocal lines and the uncanny knack to be able to write and produce catchy songs with instant hook lines.

Tom has a permanent disability, caused by a spinal injury when he was 17. People would call his disability serious (it affects his legs, hands and fingers), yet he believes his impairment feeds his creativity, inventiveness and musicianship.

- ***www.tomdoughty.com***

WIN! THE HOLY GRAIL GUITAR SHOW 2016 TICKETS

The luxury and boutique guitar extravaganza that is the Holy Grail Guitar Show will take place in Berlin on 8-9 October. And as *Acoustic* is the show's media sponsor, we're happy to be able to offer two free tickets to this year's show – which the organisers are billing as *'the* international address for high-end, custom built instruments.'

If you want to see some of the world's finest luthiers in one place – and try some of their latest wares – don't miss this outstanding opportunity.

Simply answer the following question:
Indiana Jones searches for the Holy Grail in which film?

A) Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade
B) Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull
C) Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom

Just head to **www.acousticmagazine.com/competition** and submit your answer and details for your chance to win. First prize is a pair of tickets, with three runners-up receiving a ticket each. Usual T&Cs apply; travel and accommodation not included. The winners will be chosen by 21 September 2016.

THE HOLY GRAIL GUITAR SHOW

DR STRINGS SCALES NEW HEIGHTS WITH K3 RANGE

DR Strings has boosted its string range with K3 coated strings. The four new ranges of coated strings included the colour coated: Red Devils, Silver Stars, Black Beauties and the clear-coated Dragon Skins.

The coated strings offer greater longevity by offering greater corrosion protection compared to uncoated strings. DR also claims that the K3 coated strings "provide more volume, greater clarity and articulation as well as producing fewer unwanted overtones."

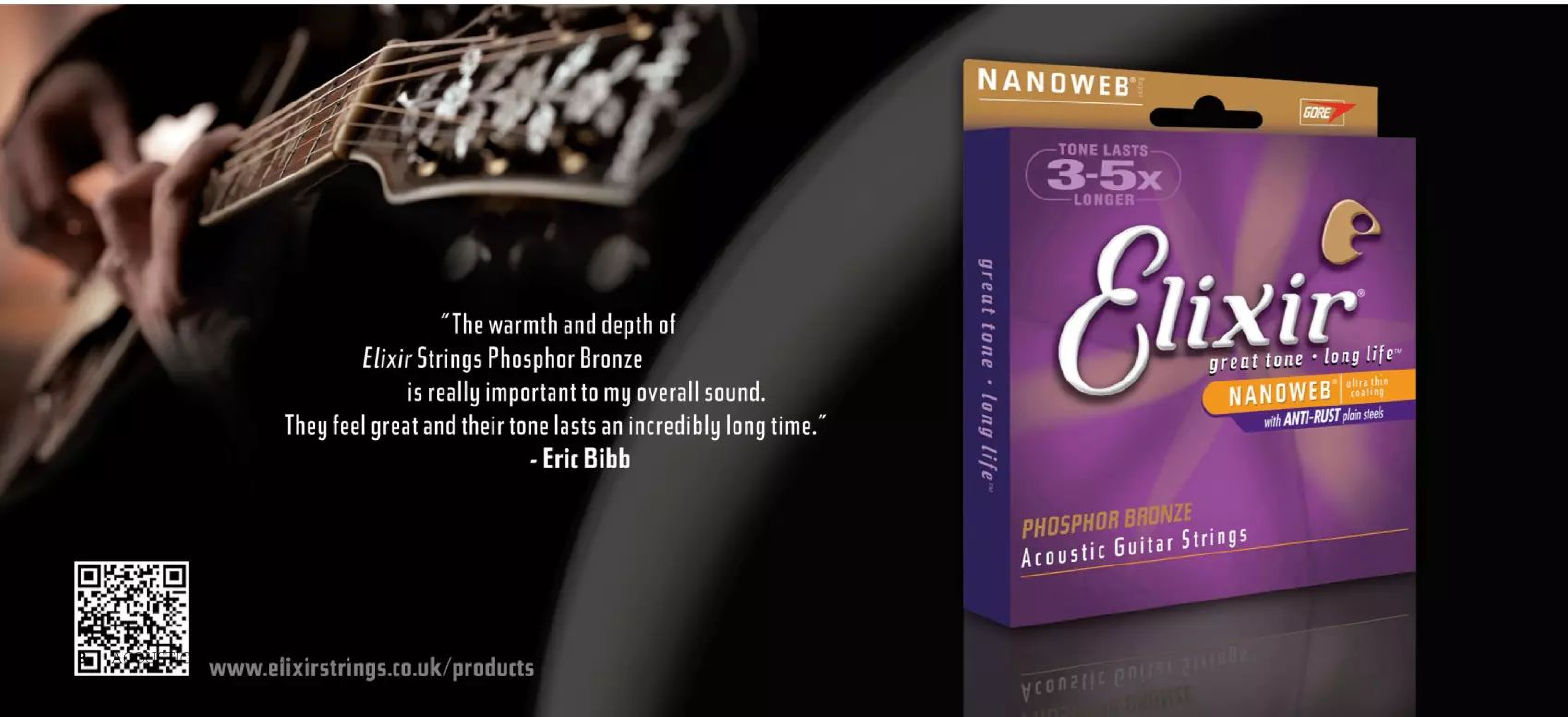
Barnes & Mullins, exclusive UK distributors of DR Strings, confirmed that the new strings will be available as full sets or single strings. For more info visit ***www.bandm.co.uk***.

ROCKSCHOOL MASTERCLASSES AT LAS

Rockschool, the world's leading contemporary exam board, will run two high-profile masterclasses at this year's London Acoustic Show.

Taking place on the Saturday and Sunday, both masterclasses feature high-profile acoustic specialists Carl Orr (Billy Cobham, *Acoustic* columnist, Ronnie Scott's House Band) and Andy Jones (Brian May, Van Morrison, Julian Lloyd Webber, *Total Guitar* columnist). The masterclasses will feature performances, seminar and Q&A and performances from Patti Revell (vocals) and Nik Preston (bass).

Carl's masterclass will focus on techniques and concepts for improvisation, and Andy will focus on rearrangement and accompaniment. Both masterclasses are designed to support the concepts covered in both *Acoustic* and *Total Guitar* and will feature repertoire from Newton Faulkner, Pat Metheny, Brad Paisley and Tommy Emmanuel. For more information on Rockschool, head to **www.rslawards.com.**



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LLYN GUITAR FESTIVAL LINEUP CHANGES

Mike Dawes has been added to the lineup for the Llyn Guitar Festival, to replace Jerry Donahue, who is recovering from a stroke.

Event organisers said of the news: "Mike Dawes has been confirmed to appear in Jerry's absence and we are pleased to have such a brilliant guitarist as one of our main guests. Our thought and prayers go out to Jerry." All of us at *Acoustic* send our best for a speedy recovery.

A further change will see Hunter Muskett appear at the festival in place of Sean De Burca. Contact **sian@oriel.org.uk** for ticket info.

BARN ON THE FARM 2016

Barn on the Farm 2016 really was a celebration of all that we love about festivals, *writes Florence Thornton-Weeks*, a feeling that you belong there from the minute you park up, lots of like minded people all looking for a good time and, of course, an absolutely stellar line up of great musicians.

From the minute you set foot onto Over Farm in Gloucester, you know you're in good hands. The festival is big enough to feel the buzz (and create some mud) but still small enough to feel like you're part of something special.

Weekend tickets to *Barn on the Farm* in 2016 got you entry to the festival on both the Saturday and Sunday, as well as free car parking and camping from Saturday to Monday. A select few also managed to nab tickets to *Intimate Friday*, where unannounced 'special guests' performed in the evening to kick the weekend off in style: and we were lucky enough to be there.

Bear's Den were the star attraction of the Friday night and the duo, accompanied by their touring banjo player, stunned the captive audience. It takes a special kind of band to command absolute silence in a barn full of adoring fans but that's exactly what three men, two banjos, and a resonator did.

There are three stages in use over the weekend: The Wooden Barn (the festival's namesake), where artists can perform on the floor with their audience or on an eight-foot high platform to the rear of the barn; the Outdoor stage, which hosts up-and-coming artists and where you'll find people congregating to appreciate new music; and the Main Stage, which is set back from the rest in a typical festival tent. BOTF has quickly garnered a reputation for filling these stages with incredible talent who are just about to explode. Previous years' performers have included Ed Sheeran, James Bay, Matt Corby, Ben Howard, and Hozier and you can already tell that BOTF's 2016 lineup is stacked with acts about to follow suit: Oh Wonder, James TW, Zak Abel and Bear's Den to name a few.

If this has piqued your interest – good news: tickets for 2017 have just gone on sale.

www.barnonthefarm.co.uk

© Dan Harris

GUITAR REVOLUTION AT LONDON ACOUSTIC SHOW

There's still time to get involved with Chris Woods and his Groove Orchestra at the London Acoustic Guitar Show.

If you missed it, Chris is offering visitors to the show the chance to perform with him on the main stage. Here's what Chris has to say: "The piece is called 'Guitar Revolution' and it's a piece of music for an infinite number of guitars. We are launching it at The London Acoustic Show on the 10 September and you are invited to learn it and join the Chris Woods Groove Orchestra on stage at Olympia London. So get involved and don't forget your guitar!"

The piece has four parts, and there's something for everyone to learn, no matter their skill level. All the info, tabs and videos are available on the *Acoustic* ***(www.acousticmagazine.com)***, London Acoustic Show ***(www.londonacousticshow.com)*** and Chris Woods' websites ***(chriswoodsgroove.co.uk)***.

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ASK THE EXPERTS

THE MUSICIANS' UNION GUIDE ON HOW TO AVOID BECOMING A NUISANCE NOISY NEIGHBOUR

A Chartered Institute of Environmental Health recent survey revealed there were just over 80,000 noise complaints in the UK last year, with nearly 1000 abatement notices served on offenders. While a large majority of these are bona fide problems, working and studying musicians are also being accused of creating a noisy nuisance. Musicians' Union members are increasingly involved in these kinds of disputes. Here's the lowdown on what the issue is and how you can protect yourself.

Under the Noise Act (1996) and the Environment Protection Act (1990), the local authority has an obligation to deal with noise that is considered a nuisance. "We get a lot of calls from members, particularly in London as we all live on top of each other," says Jo Laverty, MU regional organiser for London.

As a rough guide, local authorities often state that if your neighbour can hear you practising above the sound of the TV it can be considered a nuisance. Of course, this is a subjective guideline and depends on how loud your neighbour listens to the TV. What classes as 'excessive noise' can also depend on the time of day, how often and for how long you play.

However, official parameters exist. For example, night hours are considered to be between 11pm and 7am, so acceptable noise levels are much lower during these hours. If an authority agrees that the noise is affecting the health of the complainant or interfering with the enjoyment of their property it can be deemed to be a 'statutory nuisance'.

If a casual conversation between neighbours can't resolve it, local authorities will help neighbours come to a mutually agreeable situation – sometimes through mediation – but occasionally it can, Jo reports, "get completely out of hand". When communications do break down it can descend, not only into a litigious mess, but into a situation in which a musician can't work or a student will struggle to pass their exams.

Neighbours complaining about musicians practising raises issues about the definition of 'noise'. While most reasonable people accept that the sound of someone repeatedly playing scales can be tiresome, we should be celebrating music and the opportunity to learn and play an instrument. "What we have a problem with," says Jo, "is authorities labelling playing music at home as a statutory nuisance, particularly when these are professional musicians or budding students."

> **"If a casual conversation between neighbours can't resolve it, local authorities will help"**

Be pro-active. Approach your neighbour to discuss whether they can hear your music, or agreeing specific times to practise your instrument can help keep relations friendly.

Playing loud and late will inevitably create a problem, so try to keep practice limited to a few hours at a time and at reasonable hours. Unplug the amp, close the windows, and if possible practice in a sound-proofed room.

If you find yourself the subject of a noise complaint because of your work or practice as a musician, and you're an MU member, get in touch with your regional office for advice via theMU.org. You can also find us on Twitter @WeAreTheMU or on Facebook at facebook.com/Musicians.Union. ■

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SHAWN COLVIN & STEVE EARLE

WORDS & IMAGES: RICHARD ECCLESTONE

Shawn Colvin and Steve Earle – two hugely talented and successful artists in their own right – have joined forces to release their eponymous debut album. We caught up with them as they toured the UK

Shawn Colvin and Steve Earle are two of the most pre-eminent modern day American songwriters; both with long, successful and influential individual solo recording careers. Now the long-time friends have joined forces to record the eponymous *Colvin and Earle*. Initially this may seem a slightly odd juxtaposition of styles, though both artists are known to load their songs with the melancholy of failed dreams, relationship struggles and myriad other familiar aches sourced in life's passing. Where Colvin tends to deliver this with tenderness and a vocal softness often veiling the lyrical punch, Earle sometimes appears battle bruised but ready for life's next fight. How did they feel about this perceived clash?

"I have a theory that Shawn became an artist who was associated with a lot of stuff that was very soft and that was not necessarily all she could do, it's just what happened," Earle says. "I think that women have this thing they have to deal with that men don't. 'Sonny Came Home' would be really fucking scary if it was loud and it would work, but in some ways it's scarier because it's not. If you ever read Dave Van Ronk's biography *The Mayor of MacDougal Street* he said of the folk revival of the 50s and 60s that we like the male singers to sound as authentic, as black or as hillbilly as possible even though most of them were Jewish and from New York, but we like our women singers to sing bel canto. There were girls who tried to do a mountain thing but the girls who were successful were Carolyn Hester, Joan Baez and Judy Collins."

"I just love to play guitar with Steve because I get to play louder," Colvin adds, "especially when he's playing mandolin or octave mandolin. I'm the rhythm guitar player, so when we do 'Galway Girl' I have to anchor the bass-line, I love that stuff. Buddy Miller, the album's producer put it best: Steve came towards me and I came towards Steve, both as writers and as singers."

With Miller at the helm and recording at his Nashville home, the album was laid down in under two weeks. Colvin and Earle were backed by a band consisting of Fred Eltringham on drums, bassist Chris Wood and former Earle cohort Richard Bennett on guitar.

"The record business has changed," Earle says. "You have to make records fast. Luckily we can really play and sing, so we can. Buddy Miller was the obvious choice as he's someone we have in common. We've both known him a long time and I've always wanted to work with him as producer. He was the first person I thought of, and Shawn had already thought of him when I mentioned it to her."

So that was the producer sorted easily enough, but was the speed of recording self-inflicted? "It's the way Buddy makes records: the band is in the same room as the console and we were in one room by ourselves," says Colvin. "The arrangements were fixed – we might have tweaked them, but we learned them with the band and as soon as they had them down we recorded the songs."

"We sent demos to Buddy and he sent them to the players," Earle chips in. "There was woodshedding done, but the players were never together, so everyone was familiar with what we were going to record but there were a couple of things that weren't finished yet so they didn't hear those. It's a rhythm section that Buddy used recently, and the bass player and the drummer have worked together a lot. Richard Bennett was my idea as it was something from my past, he was the heart of *Guitar Town*."

One of the albums many co-writes is also one of its highlights: the closer 'You're Still Gone', which is built on a verse Buddy Miller's wife had given Colvin years earlier. "Julie Miller had given me a couple of verses, I took my time writing the second two verses because I was thinking: 'This is so beautiful, how am I going to rise to this occasion?' I ended up taking my time with it, but once I wrote the second two verses I knew it needed something

else. I took it to Steve and he wrote the choruses, so that was a perfect little triad of writing"

The album also features four covers: Shawn Colvin bringing 'Tobacco Road' (the Nashville Teens) and the Emmylou Harris song 'Raise The Dead', and Steve Earle choosing 'Ruby Tuesday' (the Rolling Stones) and 'You Were On My Mind' (Ian and Sylvia/We Five), so how did those choices come about? "Pure fantasy camp," Earle says. "There's a Stones record that doesn't exist here in the UK called *Flowers*, it's all B-sides and singles culled from US versions of *Between the Buttons* and *Aftermath*. It has 'Mother's Little Helper', which is the first song I learned to play on guitar, and it's a very acoustic Rolling Stones record. My favourite Beatles record is *Beatles For Sale* and my favourite Stones record is *Flowers* because I can make my guitar sound like that. I wanted to sound like Jimi Hendrix, but mum and dad wouldn't let me have an electric guitar so I couldn't do it."

Colvin's admiration for the songwriting of Emmylou Harris is clear in her track choices: "Emmylou Harris is an underrated songwriter, she's written some of my favourite songs. I was in a group with her, Patty Griffin and Buddy Miller, we were called Three Girls and Their Buddy, and she would do 'Raise The Dead'. The tag line is "I'll never get out of your love alive", and I think that's a great thing to sing to another person."

Another thing that Colvin and Earle have in common is a long history with Martin Guitars. For Colvin it started with a D28 she bought in 1971: "I paid $400 to a college student in southern Illinois for it when I was a teenager. I will never forget that – it was like getting gold."

There can't be many duos that have both been honoured individually with their own Martin signature models. "It's funny, our artist guitars are basically versions of the same guitar," Earle says. "They're M-sized Martins, which are one size bigger than a OOO, but the same depth. I arrived at that as the perfect guitar to take on the road and it's all I used for performance."

Colvin's model, the M3SC, features a spruce top and features a three-piece back made of solid mahogany with a centre section of Indian rosewood. "I wanted to go for something classic," Colvin explains. "Something that looked like an older Martin rather than tarted up. I wanted something a little bit bigger than a D18 and smaller than a dreadnought, and I wanted the neck to be a little smaller than a D28 so I could play it easily, and I went for very minimal embellishment, which I sorta regret."

Steve's M-21 sports a spruce top, but he chose East Indian rosewood back, sides and fingerboard with a mahogany neck. There are differences between the two models, but the thought process behind each one was similar, though Earle's route to his signature model was slightly different. "I had to lobby for mine," he explains. "It's sorta embarrassing – I grovelled. I've known Dick Boak, who was the artist relations guy at Martin, for years. I just wanted an M sized guitar that matched my clothes and that wasn't too fancy. The two they manufacture are an M36 and M38 and I like pretty plain guitars. I love the 21 style, which is a rosewood guitar, but you can't tell it from an 18 style guitar when you are looking at it from the front – except D21s have one more position marker than D18s. Then there's the different 21 styles from before and after the war – I collect both. I just like 21 style guitars."

It becomes clear that Earle is an expert on Martins, so as someone who was known for his earlier association with Gibson, how have his guitar choices changed over the years? "I had a 30s D18 when I was 15 or 16 years old that I bought for $150, but the neck was so out, and no one in San Antonio knew how to fix it, so I traded it for an Alvarez Yairi, and that's the guitar I arrived in Nashville with. Gibsons were $350-400 and vintage Martins the same age were getting up to $1000 so I bought a Gibson and played Gibsons for years because they were cheaper. I became associated with them and my trademark became a black J100 that's on the cover of *Guitar Town*. As I got back into more fingerpicking I just wanted Martin guitars again and I started playing them and I switched over to the M sized Martins after playing Gibsons for years."

Anyone that's ever seen one of Shawn Colvin's solo shows will have observed her unique guitar style, we couldn't let this opportunity pass without asking something about the source of that. "It comes from a couple of things," she says. "Joni was a big influence because she would whack the guitar with her wrist, which I kinda amended, and she would always click the guitar with her finger nails, though I don't have any, and the other place that it came from was I played a lot of bars, dives and coffee houses for three or four hours a night by myself and I had to sound 'complete'. I decided I could make people listen a little harder if I added the drums, so that's what I did."

For Earle's guitar playing routes he cites Townes Van Zandt, John Prine, Stephen Stills, John Sebastian, Doc and Merle Watson. "I can't do it, but trying to emulate Doc and Merle is how I arrived at how I do play, which is nowhere technically that good, but that's me trying to be that. I'm aspiring to something high and that's what you need to do."

What's next? Talking to the pair, it doesn't sound like *Colvin and Earle* will be a one-off – both seem to have relished this opportunity so maybe there is more to come yet. "The reason the record happened in the first place is that we did originally do some shows together and hearing our voices together made me think 'I want to write songs for that group'," Earle says. "And I can't afford to ignore anything that makes me want to write songs." ■

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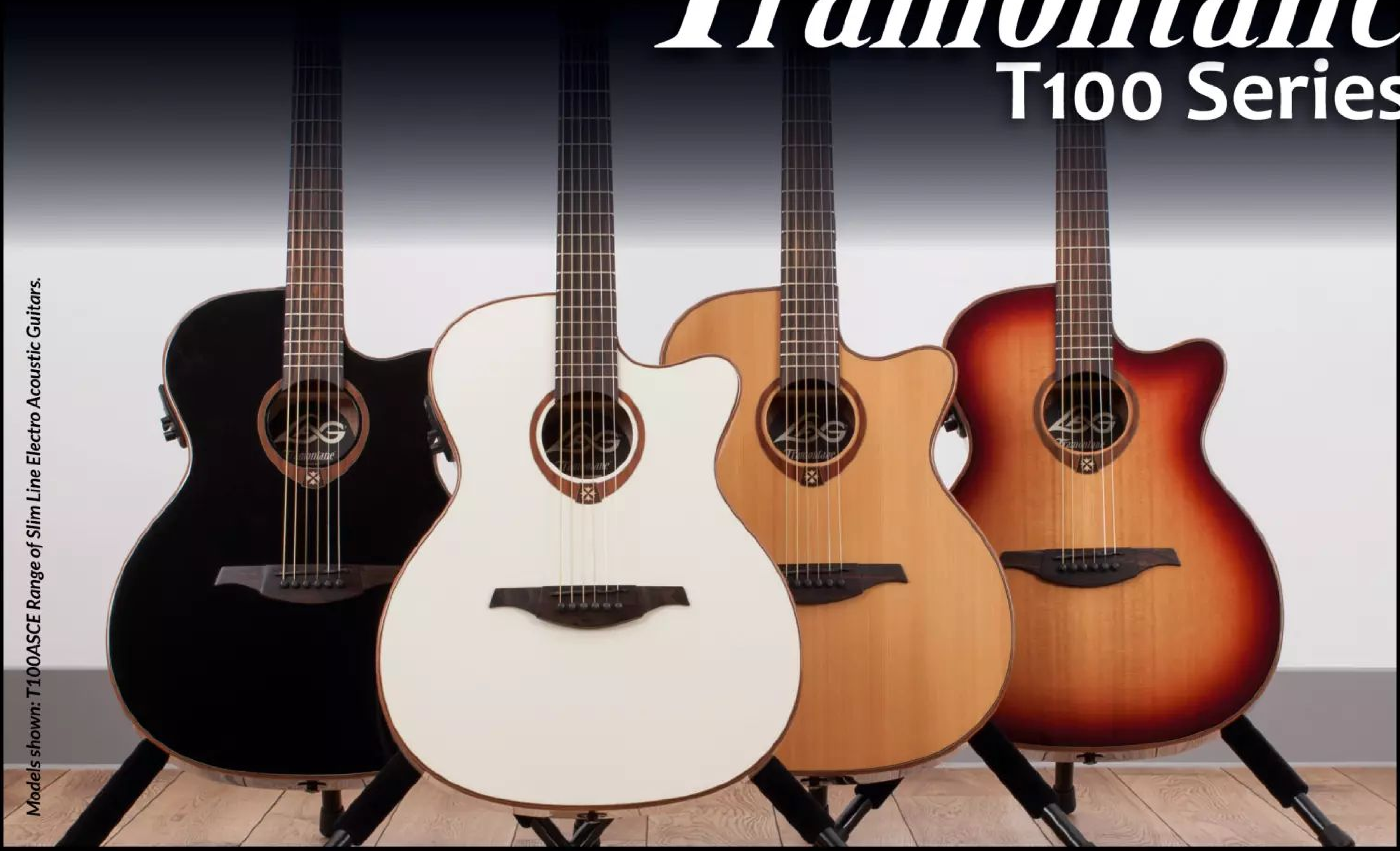
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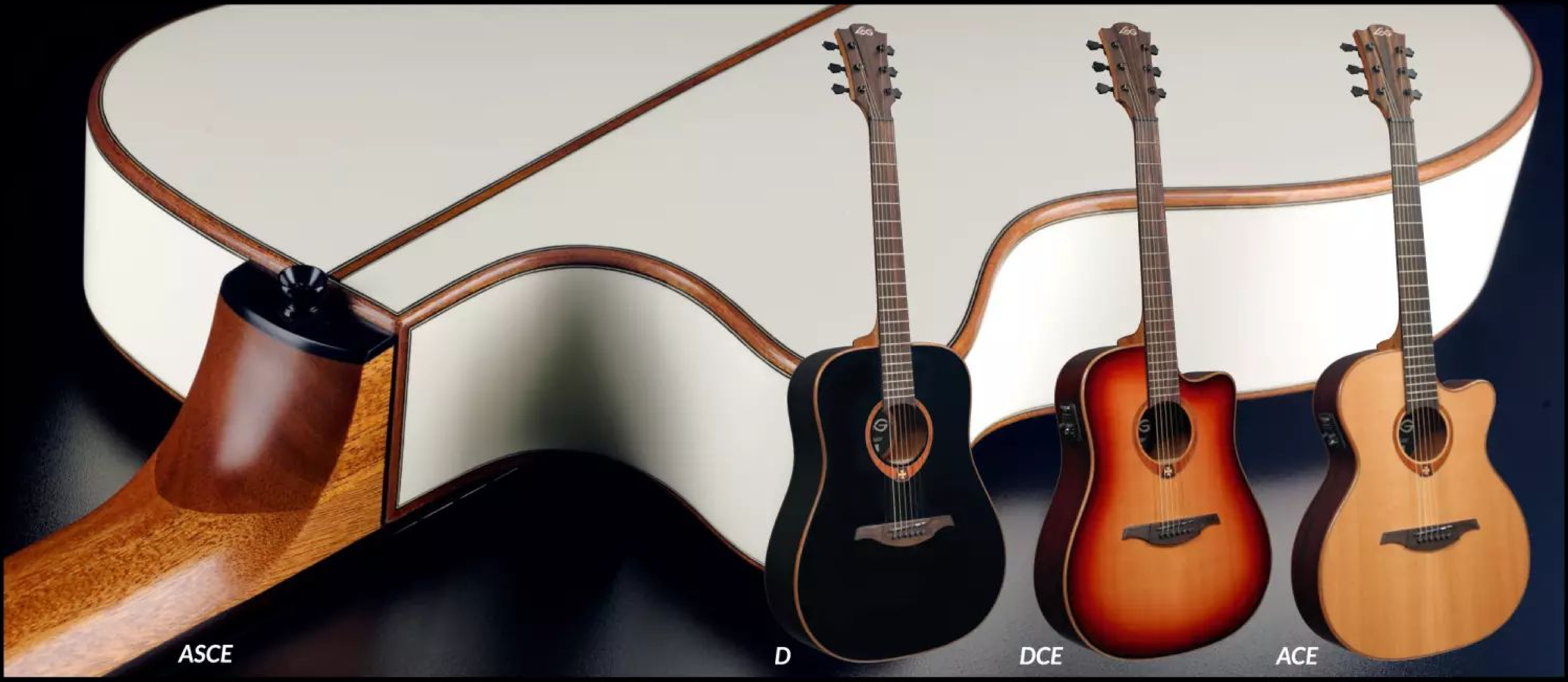

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GRETSCH

JAMIE LENMAN

WORDS: SEAN REID **IMAGES:** OLLY CURTIS

Jamie Lenman, the frontman of disbanded hardcore heroes Reuben, surprised his fanbase with the release of Muscle Memory in 2013, a double-album including an entirely acoustic disc. After entertaining 2000 Trees with just his Gretsch Resonator, he chats about influences, Steve Martin and blinding his audience

When you're attending a festival that celebrates underground rock, punk and hardcore like Cheltenham's 2000 Trees Festival, anyone dressed in a three-piece suit and a trilby hat is sure to stand out from the crowd. Jamie Lenman, here performing with his band and a solo acoustic covers set, is one such man.

Over the past 10 years, Lenman and 2000 Trees have had a unique affiliation with one another. Lenman's former band, post-hardcore trio Reuben, were scheduled to play the festival in 2008 before going on an indefinite hiatus. "There was nothing we could have done about it," explains Lenman. "I'm glad it didn't hurt them and they've gone from strength to strength. They don't bear us any ill will, which shows huge character to be able to absorb that type of thing."

Since then, the festival's community have embraced and celebrated Reuben's existence, christening one of its campsites as Camp Reuben. Lenman is regularly asked to play, with this year's multi-faceted appearance being his second. His acoustic covers set sees him pay homage to his influences; Nirvana, Madness, Weezer, the Beatles and Queen. "It was really fun. I had never played a covers set before. I don't know why, I think it's because whenever I play guitar I see it as a tool to get my own songs out. It never occurred to me to play other people's songs as I had so many of my own from the minute I picked the guitar up."

The influence of Queen and the Beatles is something Lenman speaks of in detail during our conversation. It's the former that encouraged him to pick up a guitar: "We had gone to Bulgaria and they had all these markets selling crap to tourists. They had all these tapes and one of them was Queen's *Greatest Hits*. I came back off holiday with this bootleg cassette and I wanted to start playing guitar.

Spearheaded by his influences, Lenman soon took up the guitar: "I progressed really quickly. In the first year or so I got really good. Someone told me at the time I was playing at a 15-year-old's standard. which, when you're nine, sounds impressive. I've stayed at that fifteen-year-old standard ever since because as soon as I found the power chord, I never looked back."

His parents encouraged him to play piano, although his preference for guitar remained intact. "My parents, quite rightly, said start with piano because from a piano you can go

"I think nostalgia is a very dangerous thing. It's lovely but you can't dwell on it too much"

anywhere. It was just too hard. I was so lazy. I found it much easier to write songs on the guitar. Once I found a guitar, piano could get to fuck really, so I left that behind."

Having discovered the power chord, Jamie would go on to form Reuben – a band who cultivated a cultish fan base and plenty of critical acclaim thanks to three exceptional abums: *Racecar Is Racecar Backwards*, *Very Fast Very Dangerous* and *In Nothing We Trust* – before calling time on the band in 2008. He spent the next few years away, focusing on his other career as an illustrator, before releasing his debut solo record in 2013. *Muscle Memory* was a double record that saw Lenman revisit his heavier, hardcore days on disc one, and ditching his electric guitar in favour of a raft of acoustic instruments while exploring folk, blues and jazz on the second.

"After I left Reuben, my musical taste got heavier and I wanted to write some stuff as heavy as that, but then the new thing that came to me was the folkier side of things.

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I found an appreciation. I had never really understood it before."

Lenman's new discoveries revolved around country, pre-war jazz, and acts such as CW Stoneking and the Carolina Chocolate Drops. His interest in the banjo, which features frequently on *Muscle Memory*, stems from listening to comedian – and master banjo player – Steve Martin.

"Before I didn't have much patience for things that harkened to the past. When you're young, you want to listen to everything that is new and out now. When you're older, I think you have more patience for glimpses into the past. I wouldn't want to stay there because I think nostalgia is a very dangerous thing. It's lovely but you can't dwell on it too much."

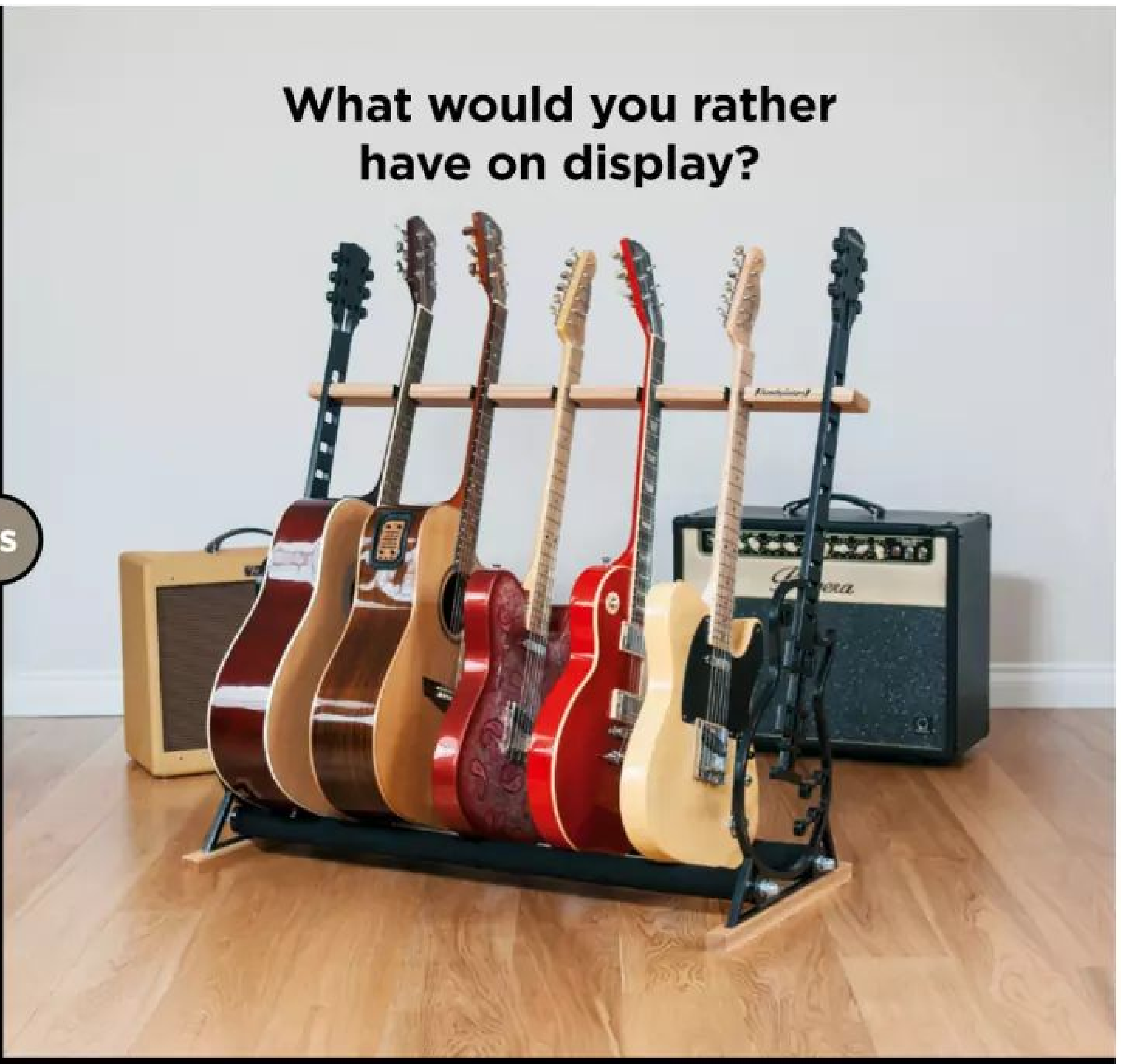
Muscle Memory also saw Lenman expand his set of skills, playing a range of instruments; bass, drums, piano and a variety of brass instruments. "I play all the brass instruments; trombone, trumpet, tube and the baritone. It's all the same sort of technique. I gravitate to the lower end instruments."

As for his primary instrument, the guitar, Lenman doesn't consider himself a gear head, but during his musical career he has become friends with Fender and Ibanez ("Anything that is free I'll take it") with the former being his current preference. "They gave me a Stratocaster Blacktop HH which really synced with my sound. I used to play a Cyclone before I smashed it. Since I started doing the folk stuff, they've kitted me out with a couple of nice bits. They gave me a lovely resonator guitar: a Gretsch Bobtail electro-acoustic. It looks beautiful. If anything, it distracts people from how bad my performance is. I can shine that reflector plate into people's eyes and they get blinded and they think 'it must be a great show because look at the guitar!' It lets me get away with a multitude of sins."

As for technique, Lenman reassures us that the power chord is all that you need:

"I quickly learned that I didn't have the chops or the fingers to be widdling, but as soon as I realised you could write a whole song with a power chord, that was all I needed. It was songs I was more interested in than technique or soloing."

When it comes to discussing potential new material, Lenman is keen to look for an opportunity that will expose him to a new audience. "I'm always writing but it's more about the opportunity. I would do another record but only if it was a label that had a bit of reach. Then I would be very excited." ■



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DISPLAYED IN STYLE

RICKY GERVAIS

Ricky Gervais: comedian, actor, director, writer, owner of seven BAFTAs… and lover of acoustic guitars. With David Brent: Life On The Road about to hit the cinemas we speak to the man himself about the art of writing good bad songs

WORDS: STEVE HARVEY **IMAGES:** JOBY SESSIONS

On pretty much a daily basis, *Acoustic* receives offers from PR agents and publicists seeking editorial for their artists, but this one was different. "Would you like some time with Ricky Gervais? He loves his guitars and he's specifically asked for some guitar press." Before too long, *Acoustic* was heading off to Gervais' offices in Hampstead to talk with a man who turns out to be deeply passionate about acoustic guitars, acoustic music and, despite his A-list status and accompanying fortune, is refreshingly humble and self-effacing. After explaining *Acoustic*'s editorial remit – acoustic guitars, mainly – Gervais responds, "Good. That's all I know about, but I don't know much."

It wasn't a total surprise to learn that Gervais wanted to speak with guitar magazines. We remember the fantastically awkward YouTube videos *Learn Guitar With David Brent*. Looking back, he sneaks a song into everything he does: *The Simpsons*, *Sesame Street*, *Extras* (performing with David Bowie) and *The Office* have all provided Gervais with an excuse to play a self-penned tune. The new film, however, doesn't just sneak in a song: "The story follows David Brent 15 years after *The Office* documentary went out. He's now selling toiletry products as a rep up and down the country, but he never gave up the dream of being a pop star," Gervais tells us. "So he's cashed in a few pensions, he's taken holiday and he's paid for a bunch of session musicians to go on tour with him – all in the hope of getting signed. It's tragic."

To begin the interview, we ask for his memories on what inspired him to learn to play the guitar in the first place. "Cat Stevens immediately springs to mind," he says. "I loved his music and stuff like it, people like Bob Dylan, Simon & Garfunkel, and Neil Young. Cat Stevens was the first artist that was 'mine', though. Music like Dylan and the Rolling Stones was handed-down to me, mainly by my older brothers and sisters, but, in my mind, that didn't count because they'd come from someone else. Later on I began to formulate my own likes and dislikes, and Cat Stevens was my favourite. I used to love *Teaser and the Firecat* and at that time, the early 70s, there was only one instrument you dared to want to learn, and that was acoustic guitar. I wanted to learn acoustic guitar because all my favourite songs were played on acoustic guitar. The first song I learned to play was 'How Can I Tell You' from *Teaser and the Firecat*. I was 13. E minor, A, D and G."

Gervais has fond memories of his first guitar and the visit to the music shop to purchase it. "I needed a guitar but money was tight so I had to really mean it. It was my birthday and Christmas all rolled into one. I remember I went in with my mum, and we looked at the cheapest one there. I think it was £10 from a shop in the centre of Reading. It was a mock-classical guitar with nylon strings. I remember the bottom E string was just an 'umph' sound – it wasn't really a note!"

Gervais did not enjoy a privileged upbringing and guitar lessons were not within the family budget. "I'd go up to my bedroom and teach myself. I didn't have a songbook – an older kid at school showed me the basic chords. I practised literally every day and night for

about six months. In fact, I was as good after six months as I am now. It was a sort of, 'get the basics and that will do' type approach."

Learning the basics, however, didn't come easily. "I remember getting so frustrated with that guitar that I'd bite it, literally bite it, and throw it across the room because my stupid fucking little fingers couldn't hold down a chord properly. I was good at school, but I was the type of boy that if I wasn't good at something immediately I didn't do it. Then the guitar came along and I thought, 'It's not gonna beat me!' I used to come downstairs like nothing had happened. I'd sit on the sofa calmly and ask what was on telly, but upstairs I'd been smashing my guitar about because I couldn't get a specific chord. I still remember actually biting the guitar like a mental case. I used to think, 'fuck barre chords, I'll play C, F, A minor, and G instead. And if I really need it I'll throw in E minor.' That's why all my songs sound a bit country and folk. I think I've got every tune possible out of those four chords over the years.

"Of course, I went on to discover open chords, suspended fourths, augmented chords, and I thought I'd invented them. I'd show someone a 'new' chord I'd come up with and they'd reply 'No, that's Dsus4/F#' or whatever it was. I then got to a point when I was about 14 or 15 where I didn't just want to play Cat Stevens and Bob Dylan, I wanted to use the guitar to start writing my own songs."

Gervais is pretty brutal about his early attempts to write 'proper' songs in emulation of his heroes. "The serious songs I wrote back then are much more embarrassing than the David Brent stuff," he admits. "I seriously don't even want to talk about them, or tell you some of the lyrics or song titles. I'm in a much better place now. David Brent writing songs? Talk about irony and a 'Get Out of Jail Free' card! Now I can do all the things that I actually like, as David Brent, and ruin it a little bit."

As we discuss the music that formed his musical tastes, it's clear there's a link between Brent and his early folk influences. "That's why the songs I write are so good for Brent. Even though they're derivative, they are insanely catchy, so you listen more to what he sings about and that's what folk was to me really. It was all about what they were singing about. This wasn't high art in terms of music, but in the lyrics they were bleeding from their heart. At the age of 13 or 14, lyrics were everything. I wanted poetry in A minor."

We start to drill-down into the process of songwriting – both proper songs and Brent's awkward attempts. "I'd probably start with a little riff that had just come into my head. But with Brent it's very different. I'll sit down and ask myself, 'What would he sing about next?' So, Brent does a few things; he writes songs where he wants to change the world, but really he's doing it for effect. He's saying, 'Look at me, I care about the Native American', or 'I want to end all prejudice'. Or he'll sing a kind of fantasy – and they're not comedy songs, they're just inappropriate songs for a middle aged rep to be singing about. Songs like 'Freelove Freeway', or 'Ooh La La' are cracking little old country pop songs, and they're not ludicrous. It's just when you realise who's singing about crossing America picking up chicks, it's suddenly laughable."

Gervais is a master of writing music in character. He explains: "I'm trying to write a really good bad song, so I'll start by writing something quite serious and then ask what I can do to make it slightly too obvious – but not too much. Essentially, when writing a really good bad song you stop yourself having inhibitions about what the *NME* might say, and because I've got that get-out clause, that irony, what you're left with is a great parody. It's not spoofy, it's not mad. Brent's not getting things wrong, he's not playing the guitar badly or getting his fingers caught in the strap. He's not doing stupid rhymes. He's writing the best song he can write, but he's a bit of an idiot. It's also the backstory that's mainly funny. When some people hear Brent's album they get really confused and ask themselves, 'Am I meant to hate this, because I really like it?'. Well, you are allowed to like it because you know it's a joke. If that was a proper, real band singing those songs, people would wonder what they're on about. But because you know it's not to be taken seriously, you can like it."

"I love the acoustic singer-songwriter thing – just a voice and guitar, it doesn't get any better. And it doesn't get any worse than David Brent"

"I'll usually base a song on something. 'Ooh La La' is really 'Take It Easy' by the Eagles. 'Life on the Road' is Brent's Springsteen song – but he's singing it about repping. 'Lady Gypsy' is loosely based on Cat Stevens' 'The Boy With A Moon and Star On His Head'. I've just taken the feeling or sentiment of the song and added in my own folk-type lyrics."

In talking about comedy songwriting, Gervais explains that the joke is in the lyrics – generally played over a simple four-chord phrase. "Brent's trying to do that folk thing, thinking of 18th century England. 'It is you I wish to share my body with,' because they can't talk normally. You have to talk like you're in a Thomas Hardy or Jane Austen novel. 'Lady Gypsy' starts with the line 'When I had known only 18 summers'. He can't say 'I was 18 years old', he has to say 'When I had known only 18 summers', as if years were measured in the number of summers! It's almost a parody of folk – but an affectionate one – I love folk, it's my favourite.

"I think about what Brent would sing about that would be funny, but then I'll write the best song that he can write, and I'll be serious about it. 'Equality Street' for example, the lyrics aren't that bad, but he's singing in a Jamaican accent, and that's just enough to make it awkward and uncomfortable."

In support of the film, David Brent (with his band Foregone Conclusion) is releasing a 20-track album, an accompanying songbook and staging a series of concerts. We put it to Gervais that he obviously wants people to enjoy, learn and play the songs. "Yes, I want people to know and enjoy the songs, but they've got to know that this is David Brent's songbook. It's what he would do. If it was Ricky Gervais' songbook, that'd be mental. No, if that was the case, shoot me. People have got to know it's a comedy book – even the intro paragraphs to the songs aren't meant to be taken seriously. It's real, because realism is funny, so the notation and chord diagrams are exactly right. The jokes are in the lyrics. Realism is the most important thing. Brent's songs aren't spoof songs, they're songs by a fictional character who's got no chance, but he's trying his best – or is he? Does he truly think he's going to become a pop star? Is he ok spending all that money? Or is it eating him up inside?"

Brent's band, Foregone Conclusion, is a 'proper' band made up of 'real' musicians. We ask how Gervais went about putting the band together. "It was one-stop shopping. I met Andy Burrows [drummer for Razorlight] on the *Jonathan Ross Show* when Razorlight were at their height. We got on well – I remember I used an indelible marker to write on his forearm 'Extras DVD still available', and he went along with the gag. And then I bumped into him a few years later at a Tom Odell gig and then again when I was doing the 'Equality Street' sketch for Comic Relief. I knew I shouldn't ever bring back

The Office, but I remember thinking that if I ever wanted to bring Brent back, music is what he'd be pursuing. He'd still be trying. He would have seen *X-Factor* and *Britain's Got Talent* since *The Office*, and he'd be thinking, 'If Susan Boyle can make it, so can I.' I said to Andy, 'I've had an idea; maybe Brent should be doing some gigs.' 'I'm in, leave it to me,' he said, and before I knew it he had a band. So, basically, Foregone Conclusion is Andy and his band."

Prior to meeting with Gervais, *Acoustic* was invited to a press preview screening of the new film. He asked what I thought of the film to which I answered, "I found it as sad as I did funny," to which he replied, "You're meant to. Brent is sadder now, and you're meant to like him more because he's more of an underdog. He's 15 years older in a world that's harsher. *The Office* came from me watching a lot of those docu-soaps of the 1990s where an ordinary person has his 15 minutes of fame and now he's got a DVD to show the kids. But fame is insatiable these days. It's harsher. We've had *The Apprentice* since *The Office* where people get on it saying they'll destroy anyone that gets in their way. There's a new culture of dog eat dog out there. These days people would rather be known for being an arsehole than not be known at all. So, now when you see David Brent, he's a little bit older, a little greyer, a little bit more desperate, in a room full of bigger arseholes than he was when he was the boss. Suddenly you're on his side, almost."

Within reach of his desk at his north London offices is an acoustic guitar. We ask if he could be accused of being a collector. "Guitars are probably the only thing in the world where I always think I want another one. I don't do that with anything else. I buy a pair of trainers and wear them until they wear out, but whenever I see a guitar, I want it. They are like animals to me, they're all unconditionally beautiful. I see them as functional works of art. It's why I also like antique furniture. I like to see that craftsmanship because we're missing it now. Everything is downloadable so I like the fact that someone sweated over it, be it a guitar or piece of furniture. If someone is passionate about something, so am I for them – even if I don't like it. I'm like it even if I see a group of trainspotters. My comedy side wants to tell them, 'You can go to the pub now', but I also think 'good for you'."

"I've got a Baby Taylor and a Gibson electric I bought to play with a mate, but my favourite guitar is my Martin, which is here in the UK. It's the same guitar from the *Learn Guitar With David Brent* YouTube series of videos – that's my actual guitar. I've also got a 12-string that I got from a place in Oxford. I love 12-string guitars, they sound lovely, they're so instantly of a time. I used to have a 12-string years ago but couldn't ever really play it. I was thinking that, with my now adult hands, I'd be able to play it, but I still struggle!"

For someone so obviously passionate about guitars, and given the fortune he has amassed, Gervais is surprisingly reluctant to splash-out on vintage or desirable acoustics – restrained mainly by a respect for the instrument and its likely future use. "I was in a shop about five years ago and they had a second-hand Martin which had apparently been owned by Joni Mitchell. It was beautiful, but I didn't buy it because I didn't think I deserved it. I'm a failed musician and I didn't think I was worthy. Because what I was doing musically was really a joke, I didn't think I was allowed it. I've got another guitar at home, which is even more

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amazing, but I don't play it because I don't think I should. It was given to me on my 50th birthday by Christopher Guest [the writer behind *Spinal Tap* – and who plays Nigel Tufnel in the film], and it's a museum piece for me. What if I damage it? I get it out, and I should play it – he'd want me to play it, but I don't. I play for fun and I play for this part of my career, but I never take them for granted."

As mentioned, Brent and Foregone Conclusion have played some gigs, with more in the diary. "David Brent has allowed me to play again. Apart from the fact that I'm doing it as a joke, it's still lovely to do. Foregone Conclusion is a joke, but it's still amazing to have a band behind you onstage – and I still think it's funny that David Brent has sold out the Hammersmith Apollo!" Does that mean we should expect to see Brent on the bill for next year's Glastonbury? "He might do. But this is not going to be something ongoing. I won't do tours, I'll do fun gigs and keep it fresh. I think people are grown-up enough to get it now. People understand that he's stepped out of the telly for our amusement."

Gervais is at pains to stress that the gigs are very much David Brent's, not his own. Gervais plays the entire show in character. "I'm in character all the way through and the audience laughs from the moment I walk out on stage. I broke character once by laughing. I was singing 'Freelove Freeway', and when I sang the lyric, 'Cause none of them was you', the audience replied, 'What you?' – just like Tim did in the original scene from *The Office* – and it just made me laugh. They sang along like I was the Rolling Stones or something."

We wonder if getting out and playing live again has revived the inner pop star within Gervais, and if Brent's success will lead to him doing his own 'serious' gigs. "Never in a million years," he says adamantly. "The day that you see me saying, 'Ricky Gervais – the man behind the man', shoot me. When a celebrity or comedian releases a serious album because they've got fame and can do it, I genuinely don't know what to do with myself. That would be me losing all self-awareness and it doesn't count."

As a mark of how relaxed Gervais is, he tells us to ignore his PR agent who has just given the 'five minute warning', and we begin talking again about the music that he loves. "I love the acoustic singer-songwriter thing – just a voice and guitar. For me, it doesn't get any better. And it doesn't get any worse than David Brent." ■

Gervais' new film David Brent: Life on the Road is out in UK cinemas now.

DAVID BRENT SONGBOOK

To coincide with the much anticipated UK cinema release this summer, *David Brent: Life on the Road*, Blink Publishing will release the official book, *David Brent Songbook.*

The songbook is the official companion to the film, song introductions written by David Brent, with all music by David Brent and to also include exclusive images of David Brent. The book will be arranged for piano, voice and guitar.
Gervais says, "This book is a dream come true for Brent. At last, the chance to pontificate about his art and divulge the stories behind such classics as 'Equality Street', 'Native American', 'Lady Gypsy', 'Slough', and 'Please Don't Make Fun of the Disableds'. Even though this is clearly a humour book, the sheet music is real and the songs are insanely catchy and easy to play. Go and get the guitar."

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BENJAMIN FRANCIS LEFTWICH

WORDS: FLORENCE THORNTON-WEEKS **IMAGES:** JOSEPH BRANSTON

After The Rain marks the triumphant return of Benjamin Francis Leftwich five years after he released his acclaimed debut album. But after the death of his father, and a self-imposed two-year break from touring and performing, he tells us why now is the right time to start again

Benjamin Francis Leftwich was a man with the world at his feet. In 2011 he released his debut album, *Last Smoke Before The Snowstorm*, which made an impact on the UK charts. He would then perform at the London Acoustic Show in 2012, captivating the main stage audience with his well-crafted songs about love and heartbreak. And he was seeing huge popularity on music streaming sites – in 2014 Spotify named his track 'Shine' its most addictive track, or the track that had the most repeated listens during that year. But then, he disappeared from the public eye. He resurfaced in February this year when he posted a deeply personal letter to his fans, explaining the reason behind his absence: grief caused by his father's death to lung cancer in 2013. He ended the letter with a promise to share a new song the next day.

Now, six months after he posted that letter, Leftwich has released his second album, *After The Rain*, and is getting ready to embark on major UK and US tours. It seems the break from touring hasn't dulled his enthusiasm for it. "I just needed to focus on other things for a while," says Leftwich when I ask about his two-year hiatus from performing live. "Songwriting was a release when I was going through some really tough times and I am so grateful to have that, but it just wasn't the right time to be touring in that period."

Leftwich makes no secret of the fact his father was the inspiration behind many of his tracks, both past and present, and he's finding new ways to stay connected to the man who played such a major role in encouraging him to chase his passion as a songwriter: "My sister tagged a picture on Facebook of me as a child in my dad's arms and he was wearing this scarf," Leftwich tells me when I compliment his outfit. "I just love it – I take it everywhere with me, including gigs. The amount of times that people have tried to take the scarf off the mic stand… they don't know what it means to me but my sound guys quickly put them in their place!"

"At the time I was writing *After The Rain*, I was concerned about hope for the future and concerned about the sun coming up again"

Leftwich's first album, *Last Smoke Before The Snowstorm*, introduced the world to his heartbreaking and relatable lyrics, and so listening to his second album – and being aware of the circumstances around its creation – I was expecting to make my way through five boxes of tissues before the end of the first track. The reality is very different. Leftwich has enlisted the services of a number of musicians to create lush, full arrangements for his songs, and although there are some very clear connections between the lyrics and what was going on in his personal life, the melody and general feel of the songs are much more uplifting. "At the time I was writing *After The Rain*, I was concerned about hope for the future and concerned about the sun coming up again, so I think even those moments of positivity are actually a reaction to moments of deep sadness," Leftwich explains.

"For me, this album has got a lot more colours on it. I'm still very proud of the first album, but *After The Rain* is a lot more

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dynamic both in terms of songwriting and production, and overall spirit.

"There are still moments that are really sad," he adds. "Parts of 'Tilikum' or 'Frozen Moor' or 'Kicking Roses' are highly self reflective, and then moments in 'Summer' and 'Some Other Arms' are just taking a positive spin on sad and negative things."

The ability to find the positives from the negatives in his music was in no small part due to Leftwich allowing himself the time out to get back in the right headspace. His record label, Dirty Hit, remained supportive, too, leaving him and his private life exactly that: private. This, despite the pressure they must surely have felt for Leftwich to follow up the success of *Last Smoke Before The Snowstorm* with LP2 and cash in on the then burgeoning acoustic scene. But it is clear from talking to him that making music for any motivation other than one of integrity doesn't cross his mind, even when dealing with 'the difficult second album': "I wanted to wait until I had a body of work that I was happy with and now I'm really proud of the songs and the people I worked with on it. I did feel the pressure a little bit, though" he says, "but to be honest, my main concern is the quality of the songs and the quality of the music and releasing music that I consider to be honest and true. I think the minute you try to second-guess your audience you lose a bit of that integrity. Of course I'm aware that I have an audience, but I just try to do what's right for myself and for the context of my spirit."

Having lost my own father not so long ago, I feel a deep connection with a lot of the songs on the album that reference his father's passing in his 'honest and true' lyrics, but when I tell him that it strikes me as brave to write songs about an experience that not that many people in Ben's audience will have had, he remains self-effacing: "I don't really think about how tracks will be received, I just write songs that I like and that I'm happy with. The rest is in someone else's hands. I'm lucky that I've got a beautiful group of people around the world who follow me and like what I do but I'll always make music that I'm feeling. There are so many people who do this for the money, but you can hear that straight away in their music. We all have a family and we need somewhere to live, but I do what I do because I just care about music on such a deep spiritual level."

Admirably, the album manages to encapsulate many other human emotions and experiences, despite being written in the wake of one of the most emotionally all-consuming times a person can endure. Many

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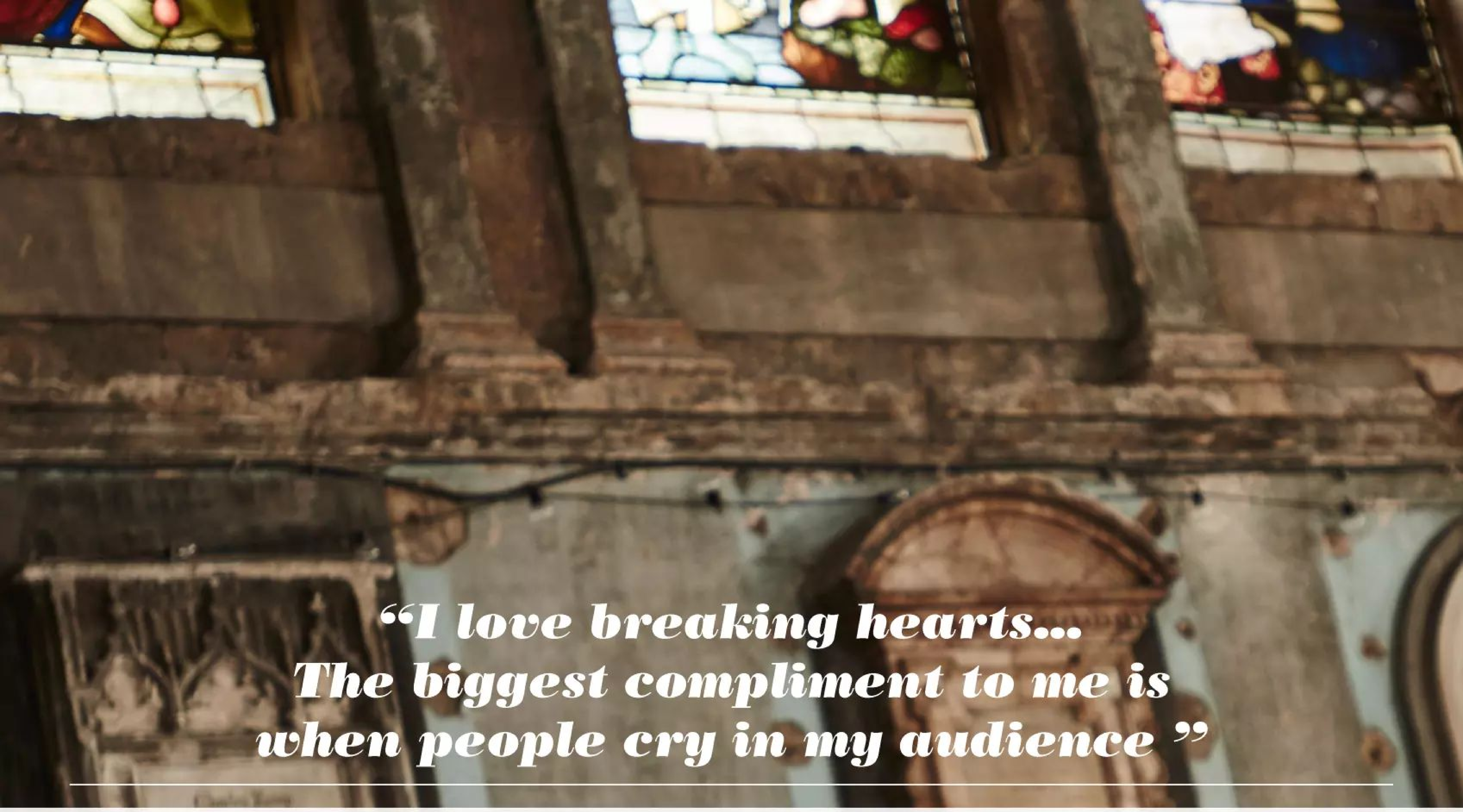

"I love breaking hearts... The biggest compliment to me is when people cry in my audience"

songs on *After The Rain* hark back to Ben's first album with a focus on heartbreaking lyrics about romantic love.

"I love breaking hearts," says Leftwich. "The biggest compliment to me is when people cry in my audience, and so there are a lot of lyrics about romantic love in there because I think that's one of the main things that humans are concerned with. I certainly am. But there are also lyrics relating to love for my sister on there, and love for my dad, and love for my friends, and love for myself, and love for the parts of the world that I come from. Take a song like 'Frozen Moor', which is definitely a song for Yorkshire."

As we're chatting, Leftwich is idly playing on his Martin guitar, taking in his surroundings, which just so happen to be an abandoned chapel in a disused asylum. "This place is beautiful. I just want to record here now," exclaims an awestruck Leftwich. He is soon in full flow, grinning at the walls as he soaks in the "very kind" acoustics of the room.

"I love writing in here," he turns to me and says, and I realise that Leftwich is both answering my questions and taking inspiration from the location to write new music. I ask if it's usual for him to write on the spot like this, or if he needs to be in a certain place to write his music. "It's never a geographical thing," he replies, "it's purely mental. I wrote some songs on this album in York, and I wrote some in London. It's more about capturing that moment and that mindset where you feel like you can create."

Helping Leftwich capture that mindset on *After The Rain* was his "dear, dear friend" Charlie Andrews, best known for his production work with Alt-J, including on the platinum-certified *An Awesome Wave*. "I love when moments of production or sonic engineering can focus in on an energy or an emotion in the song and highlight that," Leftwich says, "and I wanted to experiment with that, especially since I was working with someone as talented as Charlie and Brett, his engineer."

Andrews supplied drums on certain tracks on the album, and his wife played strings. "I use the strings a lot on there because I love sounds like that," Leftwich says. "And Charlie and I recorded a lot of the drums and the guitars live together, which are pretty special. 'Tilikum' was pretty much just a live recording of my guitar and Charlie supplying the beat."

As far as his guitar goes, Ben is a C.F. Martin & Co. guy through and through. "I love Martin. [My current guitar is the one] I've been playing since I started touring and I'm so grateful for Martin and their love... it also helps that they are ridiculously nice acoustic guitars." But he hasn't always been so well endowed in the guitar department. He recalls his first guitar was a "horrible nylon string thing" that his dad bought, but that didn't put him off the instrument. "I love the way acoustic guitar sounds and I love playing it. It's something I've grown up playing and I always will," he says. "But I definitely see the guitar as a tool for songwriting in the same way I see the piano. I respect flamenco guitar players, who are amazing guitar players and can play like demons. But that's just not me... I can't even read music. I like just being able to do my own thing and learn from records that I was in love with."

He cites the Beatles, Damien Rice, and José Gonzales as artists producing records that influenced him, but his tastes are ever evolving. "It was those guys when I was growing up, but now my tastes have widened and I listen to mainly hip hop and rap, but even there the foundations are in acoustic guitar. I love Drake. If I could draw elements of his style into my next album, that would be great."

Despite having ideas for where his music may take him next, Leftwich writes each song individually and without an album in mind. "I focus on the song itself as I'm writing it and then, over the course of time, if ideas and themes come together that can bring an album together. But that's a long process and it can't be rushed."

Though it's a process that can't be rushed – a fact Leftwich's fans are acutely aware of having waited five years for his second album – I remind him that he's just told me that he's spent our interview writing new songs. Does that mean he's here to stay after his break from music and the public eye?

"I'm just loving music, and I'm proud of the music I've made, and I'm loving playing it and playing shows round the world. I'm just grateful for it all. So if I'm happy with my third album in a year's time, I'll release it then, and if I'm happy with it in 10 year's time, I'll release it then. I'll make the most of any of the blessing afforded me, but I'll always make music." ■

Leftwich will be on tour throughout September and October. More info at www.benjaminfrancisleftwich.com

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JD SIMO

JD Simo: bandleader, vintage acoustic fan and damn fine guitarist – oh, and his playing comes with a ringing endorsement from Tommy Emmanuel too. We meet the man himself…

WORDS: HUW HOPKINS **IMAGES:** ED RODE

On 28 February 2015, the opening chords to 'With A Little Help From My Friends' trickled through a Marshall stack as the drums and bass built tension from nothing and a guest guitarist widdled over the top of Simo's backline. Eventually JD Simo's distorted Gibson Flying V kicked in to provide a euphoric release to Lennon and McCartney's masterwork.

That all sounds good, but what are we doing talking about it in *Acoustic*? Well, for a start, that guest guitarist was none other than former *Acoustic* cover star and one of the greatest acoustic guitarists in the world, Tommy Emmanuel:

"I don't get the chance to play electric guitar a lot these days," Emmanuel told us. "So I jumped at the opportunity to spank the plank with a band that good. JD and I enjoyed playing off each other and letting it fly in the moment."

Eighteen months later, and guitarist Jeff Simo – known as JD for as long as he can remember – is leading Elad Shapiro and Adam Abrashoff toward the end of a European tour as part of his band, Simo. But we find him reminiscing about that gig back home in Nashville: "I first met Tommy seven or eight years ago in Nashville, and we've

"I was exposed to musicians and music that made me rethink everything. I was executing well but I wasn't saying anything – I realised what greatness really was and how far I was from it"

just become very good friends. He's like an older brother to me. We've played together a few times and the soundchecks are always more fun than the gig, because I love the country material he plays like Merle Travis or Chet Atkins. Tommy is such a joyful man. I don't think the world has ever made a better musician."

But Simo's memory is soon cast even further back, to where he grew up in Chicago: "I come from a family of athletes so I was a bit of a black sheep, but I fell in love with music. I was four or five years old when I started playing, and by the time I was a teen I'd already been playing in bars for a few years. When I was 15 I left home to go on the road and ended up in Nashville."

Today Simo plays with the experience and grace of a Jimi Hendrix-Jeff Buckley hybrid, but throughout his formative years, he played with older musicians in clubs, and later in the group Dirty Pool. "I'm so embarrassed by that crap because I was just a kid and I was playing terrible music. I soon became exposed to musicians and music that made me rethink the whole process. Up until then I was executing well but I wasn't saying anything – I realised what greatness really was and how far I was from it."

Nashville introduced him to the finest bluegrass, folk and country sounds, but Simo's album *Let Love Show The Way* has plenty of Windy City rawness to it. "Growing up in Chicago was great culturally. I saw the *Blues Brothers* and it made me want to be a performer, the movie perfectly captures the Chicago I grew up in. but the city is different today and has been gentrified and yuppied.

"The first music that got me was blues and early rock'n'roll like Fats Domino, Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Eddie Cochran and Buddy Holly. When I got older, bands like Nirvana were really big for me because they were so primal. There's been good music in the last few years, like Alabama Shakes, Jack White, Ryan Adams and Ray LaMontagne, but I'm grateful to have grown up when Nirvana ruled the world."

That same primal instinct is what inspired the album's recording process, says Simo. "*Let Love Show The Way* is going down well in Europe. The response has been incredible and we've played to our biggest crowds ever at some of the pop festivals.

"We recorded it all in the same room. In my years as a session guy, the recording process irked me because it had become so sterilised, but on our album there's a sonic thing that happens when everything bleeds into one another – which was important because it's the first thing that many people will hear from us."

But as Simo prepares to take on the Ramblin' Man Fair in Kent with his band, he explains how the group is already moving on from the turn-it-up-to-11 riffs. The album is

led by great rock music, but the songwriting is incredible, and there are quieter moments where Simo's own acoustic prowess and tender playing style shines through.

"I have a great love for acoustics," he tells us. "I love older instruments in general, but old acoustics in particular are pretty special, especially small-body guitars. We recently played Bospop in Germany and were on the bill right before Elvis Costello – I was so excited to see him. Our dressing rooms were just next to each other and he popped in and was so enamoured with my new Waterloo. He said 'Oh, Collings Guitars, that's who Rodney Crowell likes' and he flipped out over it. He told me about the old L00 that he used to write his first two albums: he lent it to Paul McCartney one time and it took forever to get it back apparently. But Elvis was really excited by the Waterloo – it's a great instrument and comes everywhere with me now.

"I've been friends with the team from Collings for years and on my last tour I played a Waterloo in this music shop and thought it was great, but I didn't know what it was or who made them. A week later I was doing an in-store gig and I found another one and loved it. I don't think I've ever found a modern guitar where I've picked up so many that were consistently good – they're perfect. Recently I've been playing an X-braced one at live concerts – it's becoming a regular part of the evening.

"When we did some shows with Warren Haynes, I ended up going on stage with him and loved playing bluegrass and traditional country music, which I don't get a chance to play anymore, so as we move forward we'll probably be doing some more folk and bluegrass songs. Finding the Waterloo was just a happy accident, but I don't think I've ever found an instrument that's inspired me so much."

This love for old instruments and sounds extends to his live set-up and recording process, as he explains: "If I want to play a folk song or do something bluegrass, I'll just mike it, but there are some Lightnin' Hopkins/Tom Waits-style songs that might end up on the next record where I use an old DeArmond soundhole pickup from the 1960s. Lightnin' Hopkins was famous for using one in his old J50 and then all the folkies ended up using them a lot. I run it into this old Epiphone amplifier and it sounds really weird.

"I like acoustic strings to sound dead. It seems like no matter which new ones I use I won't like the way they sound until they've been played in. I stick with the light-gauge EJ 116s, the phosphor bronze D'Addario, because on Waterloos the light gauge works better on shorter scale."

If you're not into the rip-roaring rock of *Let Love Show The Way*, but appreciate JD Simo's acoustic stylings on 'Today I'm Here' and the bonus track 'Please Be With Me', then his forthcoming work might be more up your street.

And if that doesn't convince you that Simo is your new favourite artist, perhaps we'll leave the last word to one of the greatest acoustic guitarists in the world, Tommy Emmanuel: "JD is not just a great blues and rock player but also an amazing country picker as well. I love his feeling for music, it's different and deeply rooted in rhythm and blues. He's a joy to play with." ■

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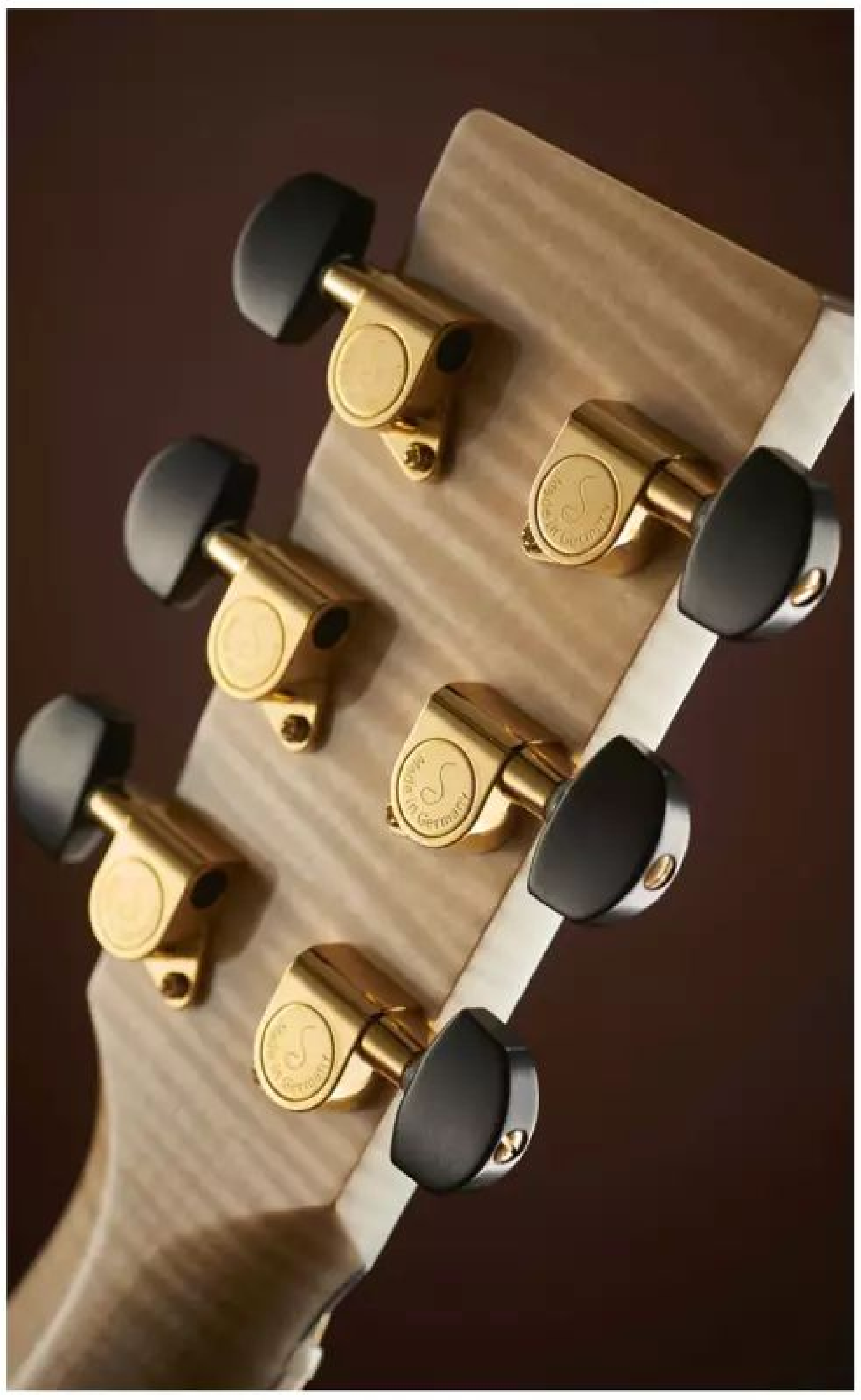

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C.F. MARTIN & CO. GPC-35E & OMC-18E

Alun Lower tests out Martin's new standard series instruments to see if a new electronics system is a game changer...

WORDS: ALUN LOWER **IMAGES:** NEIL GODWIN

Changes to a guitar company's 'Standard' series are usually quite a tricky thing to get to grips with. More often than not, the updates are minor and fairly inconsequential at best – cosmetic upgrades that make little difference to the overall package but keep things just different enough to justify the new release. But to assume such small efforts from Martin would be a mistake. Arguably the most respected acoustic guitar maker on the planet, Martin is rarely caught in such a situation. Sure enough, Martin has produced a meaningful upgrade for 2016, introducing a new electronics package from Fishman that it claims will dramatically improve the plugged-in performance of its already stellar instruments, maintaining the character and unique tonal properties of each guitar in the process. Too good to be true? Let's find out.

Opening the case of a brand-new Martin for the first time is always a special moment. You know what's waiting for you, but even so, the sheer sight and smell of such a finely crafted instrument is still capable of taking one's breath away, even if it is the same general design we've seen countless times before.

The GPC-35E kicks things off by presenting a Grand Performance outline, constructed in this instance with a Sitka spruce top and rather fetching East Indian rosewood back and sides (the back being a three-piece construction, incidentally). It's about as classic a tone combination as you can get and should be a good test for the electronics system. As always, the wood selections are consistently high-quality, with the rosewood in particular finished in a gorgeous deep gloss that shows off the rosewood's rich brown hues in all its glory. The 'select hardwood' neck is finished in satin as a contrast, and is topped by a stark, piano-black ebony fingerboard. Underneath the spruce top, the GPC sports Martin's Forward Shifted X bracing, while back on the outside the guitar is neatly bordered with three-stripe white

binding, adding to the almost uniform-like perfection of its cosmetic features.

By comparison, the OMC-18E is a much simpler-looking guitar than its sibling, with a vintage-looking tint to its equally high-quality Sitka spruce top, coupled with a less glamorous looking mahogany back and sides, and a subtle faux-tortoiseshell binding around the body. The body is a 000 size and as such is a little slimmer than the GPC – the end result is a guitar that feels noticeably lighter than its counterpart. Coupled with the relatively simple aesthetic, it would be easy to think that the OMC is a substantially lower-grade instrument on first inspection, but in truth there's only a difference of around £200 between them. The GPC definitely feels the more luxurious and substantial of the two, and the added weight to the body makes it feel a little more balanced in play, as well. Curiously, I also managed to spot a couple of slight finish imperfections around the area where the neck joins the body of the guitar, which weren't present on the GPC. They're incredibly slight, but it does take the sheen off somewhat and adds to the slight feeling of disparity between the two models.

Cosmetic differences aside, the two guitars both feature the Aura VT Enhance system by Fishman. This is pitched very much as the 'killer feature' of Martin's 2016 line-up, with the bold claim of 'making a Martin guitar sound like a Martin guitar when amplified'. The system features a bridge-mounted transducer that Martin claims will add 'dimension, resonance and body' to the tone of the guitar. In addition, the system boasts an Aura 'imaging' system, which for all intents and purposes is a profile designed to transfer the acoustic properties of each individual guitar model accurately and distinctly. So essentially, the acoustic differences between these guitars should also translate to their plugged-in performances, respectively. It's an exciting prospect and one that could not only bring Martin in line with some of its rivals, but potentially surpass them.

Controlwise, the two systems are a doddle to operate, with just a set of volume, tone and 'enhance' options places at your fingertips. The units are internally mounted too, sparing the beautiful construction of any unsightly boxes on the upper shoulders.

Acoustically, both of these guitars perform pretty much as you would expect them to – and that's no bad thing. Starting off with the GPC: the spruce and rosewood combo produces a tone with plenty of glassy treble and snappy, defined bass. It's deep, refined, and has an almost studio-ready quality to it. A simple strum sounds like it's been mastered in a studio before it reaches your ears, with every nuance of the tone layered and balanced to perfection.

By comparison, the lighter, mahogany-bodied OMC lacks the crisp top end and low end definition of the GPC, but makes up for it with the earthy, almost guttural mid-push that a quality mahogany construction brings to the table. It's not quite as dynamic, balanced or expressive as the GPC when played with a pick, but possesses a certain X-factor when

C.F. MARTIN & CO.
GPC-35E

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Martin
Model: GPC-35E
RRP: £2799
Body Size: Grand Performance
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: East Indian rosewood
Bridge: Ebony
Neck: Select hardwood
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Tuners: Chrome enclosed gear
Nut Width: 1 3/4"
Scale Length: 25.4"
Onboard Electrics: Fishman Aura VT Enhance
Gig Bag/Case Included: Ply Hardshell

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Immaculate construction and a wonderfully expressive tone. Superb electro performance
Cons: It's pricey, but it's a Martin
Overall: One of the most enjoyable and versatile Martins I've ever played

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Sound Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Overall: ✪✪✪✪✪

CONTACT DETAILS

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fingerpicking that can't help but put a smile on your face. Between the two models it's very much a case of precision versus punch, and it'll be up to you to decide which you prefer.

Personally my approach and tastes lean much more towards the GPC, which I just find a little more expressive and controllable. Both guitars shimmer with harmonics, and for fingerpicking both are excellent in their own ways. But for flatpicking there is only one winner in my books. One area where I do feel the OMC has an advantage is sheer projection – the smaller body pushes the tone in such a way that it really hits you in the gut. The contrast between the two instruments also means that they partner together rather beautifully as a duo, able to trade between lead and rhythm roles effortlessly and producing a different combination each time. Bringing in a fellow guitarist, we had lots of fun switching between the two guitars and seeing how it transformed our collective tone.

Of course, much of the appeal with this new series is how they translate to the live stage and for this, I tried playing the guitars through both an amplifier and a Line 6 PODHD on headphones. The controls may be simple but they offer a wide scope, with the tone control keeping track of the basic frequencies and the enhance control seemingly introducing the 'imaging' feature of the new systems. Starting off with a completely flat EQ and enhance on the minimum setting, both guitars produced a fairly neutral tone that certainly didn't let anything down, but that didn't set the world alight either. This would be a little disappointing on its own but if you'd rather do your adjusting on your amplifier/preamp/PA then it's a perfect foundation, especially if you use effects to alter your tone further.

For the most accurate reproduction of the guitars' acoustic tones I found it was best to stay flat with the EQ and then introduce the enhance feature, which added depth and character to both guitars in a way that was consistent with their acoustic qualities. I think we'd all be pretty astounded if the result was better than a good microphone set-up, but

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6 String Acoustics

15275 - A Clarke No. 9 Handmade Acoustic Guitar
13022 - Atkin OO Am Special Parlour Guitar
15214 - Breedlove Discovery Concert
14197 - Breedlove Discovery Concert Lefthanded
13367 - Brook Lyn 12 Fret Handmade Guitar
13189 - Brook Tamar Medium Jumbo Handmade
13188 - Brook Taw OM Size Handmade Guitar
4612 - Dave King Katrina OOO Model, Sunburst
4770 - EKO Ranger Vintage Acoustic, Natural
13544 - Eko Oliveiro Pigini Ltd Edition Acoustic
13847 - Eko Ranger 6 VR Fastlok, Vint. SB Gloss
13552 - Eko Vintage Ranger 6 in Black, Reissue
15233 - Faith FKN Naked Neptune Acoustic Guitar
14718 - Faith FMSB45 BNC Classic Burst Mercury
12331 - Faith FRMG Mars Drop Shoulder Dread.
14715 - Faith FRSB45 Drop Dreadnought
6975 - Fender CD60, Black
5096 - Fender CD60, Natural
5079 - Fender CD60, Sunburst
10245 - Fender CD60 Acoustic Guitar, Mahogany
15501 - Fender CF60 Folk
10192 - Fender CP100 Parlour Guitar
15197 - Fender PM1 Standard Dreadnought, Natural
15500 - Fender Sonoran 3/4 Mini Acoustic Guitar
14304 - Fender Starcaster Acoustic Guitar Pack
15419 - Gibson Hummingbird, Cherry Burst, C.1974
14526 - Guild D52-NT USA Made
7090 - K Yairi New Yorker NY0021B, Natural
13614 - K Yairi YT1 Acoustic Guitar
12652 - Lakewood D14 Dreadnought Acoustic Guitar
12649 - Lakewood M14 Grand Concert
13386 - Landola D85 Dreadnought Acoustic, Used
14127 - Luna Vista Mustang Electro Acoustic
15310 - Martin 00015M Mahogany Acoustic, Used
13064 - Martin D18 Dreadnought, Secondhand
15473 - Martin D28 Dreadnought, Natural
5702 - Martin D28 Dreadnought, Natural
6008 - Martin D35 Dreadnought, Natural
5013 - Martin D41 Dreadnought, Natural
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
15258 - Rainsong NP12 Nylon Parlour Guitar
11149 - Seagull Excursion Natural Folk SG
11148 - Seagull Excursion Natural Grand SG
11162 - Seagull Maritime SWS Mahogany High-Gloss
10230 - Seagull S6 Original
9601 - Tanglewood MAV Nashville Folk Acoustic
13291 - Tanglewood TPEFLS
9570 - Tanglewood TW40 DAN Dreadnought
15490 - Tanglewood TW40OD Sundance Delta Orch.
15491 - Tanglewood TW40PD Sundance Delta Parlour
14943 - Tanglewood TW40 SD VS
15489 - Tanglewood TW40 SDD Sundance Delta
13081 - Vintage V2000MGG Acoustic Guitar
13269 - Vintage V400CSB, Cherry Sunburst
10929 - Vintage VE2000DLX Gordon Giltrap
14397 - Vintage VE8000PB Paul Brett 6-String
13272 - Vintage VJ100N XL Jumbo Series, Natural
12437 - Yairi FY84 OM Folk Acoustic Guitar
12428 - Yairi Rag 65 Small Parlour Guitar
5632 - Yamaha F310 Dreadnought, Natural
6964 - Yamaha FG700S Acoustic Guitar
13387 - Yamaha FG720S Yamaha FG720S
14483 - Yamaha FS720S Acoustic, Black

6 String Electro Acoustics

10918 - Breedlove USA Gold D/SRE
13866 - Breedlove Discovery Concert CE, Sunburst
14690 - Breedlove Focus Special Edition Redwood
15224 - Breedlove Pursuit Concert Acoustic
14689 - Breedlove Revival DR Deluxe
14688 - Breedlove Voice Auditorium Small Jumbo
14686 - Breedlove Voice Concert Myrtle
14630 - Breedlove Voice Revival 000/SMe
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
4769 - EKO Ranger EQ Vintage Series, Black
12358 - Faith FKV Venus Concert Cutaway/Electro
14717 - Faith FVHG Venus Cut/Electro Acoustic
15344 - Faith Nomad Mini Neptune
15345 - Faith Nomad Mini Saturn
14730 - Fender CD100CE Left-Handed Cutaway
6943 - Fender CD60CE, Electro, Black
7024 - Fender CD60CE, Dreadnought, Electro, Nat
4335 - Fender CD60CE Dreadnought Elec, Sunburst
10320 - Fender CD60CE Mahogany Electro Acoustic
15523 - Fender CF60CE Folk-Size Cutaway Electro
14732 - Fender CJ290SCE Jumbo Maple With Case
15280 - Fender PM1 Deluxe, Vintage Sunburst
15355 - Fender PM3 Dlx Triple-0 Vintage Sunburst
14744 - Fender Sonoran SCE Left-hand Dreadnought
15525 - Fender Sonoran SCE, Candy Apple Red
6929 - Fender Stratacoustic Electro Acoustic Bk
9700 - Gibson J45 Custom Electro Acoustic
15380 - Gibson Songwriter Deluxe, Secondhand
4555 - Jimmy Moon Bryan Adams Signature
4554 - Jimmy Moon PF0003 Electro, Pau Ferro B&S

6 String Electro Acoustics

1948 - Jimmy Moon RD3, Electro, Natural
9552 - LAG T300AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
12672 - Lakewood J14CP Jumbo Electro
12658 - Lakewood M14 CP
14129 - Luna Heartsong Series Parlor Electro
14130 - Luna Henna Oasis Steel String Electro
14471 - Luna Vista Eagle Electro Acoustic Guitar
14128 - Luna Vista Wolf Electro Acoustic Guitar
13717 - Maestro Raffles AB-CSB A Guitar
13714 - Maestro Raffles FM-CSB A Custom Jumbo
12696 - Maestro Raffles Flame Maple Cust Electro
12702 - Maestro Raffles IR-CSB R Small Jumbo Electro
12790 - Maestro Raffles MDT Small Jumbo Electro
12789 - Maestro Raffles Monkey Pod Electro
13713 - Maestro Raffles MR-CSB A Custom Jumbo
14817 - Maestro Raffles MR-CSB-A Fanned Frets
12792 - Maestro Rosetta MDT Dreadnought Electro
12793 - Maestro Rosetta MRDT Dreadnought Electro
13212 - Maestro Singa Flame Maple Custom Electro
14814 - Maestro Singa M-CSB-C All Solid MedJumbo
13712 - Maestro Singa MR-CSB A Custom Jumbo
13209 - Maestro Singa MRDT Medium Jumbo Electro
13711 - Maestro Singa O-CSB Custom Medium Jumbo
14815 - Maestro Singa WE-CSB-A Medium Jumbo
13718 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
13207 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
12225 - Martin & Co 000X1AE Electro Acoustic
12222 - Martin & Co DX1AE Electro Acoustic
15474 - Martin & Co DXAE Electro Acoustic
15164 - Martin 000RS1, Secondhand
14479 - Martin 000RSGT Electro Acoustic Guitar
8277 - Martin DC15ME Dreadnought Cutaway
15487 - Martin DCPA4 Electro Acoustic, Shaded
14780 - Martin DJR Dreadnought Junior
14477 - Martin DRS2 Electro Acoustic Guitar
14478 - Martin DRSGT Electro Acoustic Guitar
15486 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic Shaded
14528 - Martin HD28 with Fishman, Secondhand,
13674 - Martin OMXAE Electro Acoustic, Black
12439 - Northwood Custom Koa 80D Electro
12438 - Northwood Custom Myrtle 80 Series D-nought
14913 - PJ Eggle Linville Cutaway Elec/Acoustic
14914 - PJ Eggle Linville Electro Acoustic
14915 - PJ Eggle Parlour Electro Acoustic
14926 - PJ Eggle Saulda Cutaway Elec/Acoustic
14927 - PJ Eggle Saulda Elec/Acoustic
10095 - RainSong BI-JM1000N2 Graphite Guitar
10094 - RainSong BI-OM1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
10038 - RainSong BI-WS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
9815 - Rainsong JM1000 Graphite Guitar
4812 - RainSong OM1000N2 Electro Acousti
10082 - RainSong P12 Parlor
10088 - RainSong P14 Parlor
9824 - Rainsong S-DR1000N2 Dreadnought Studio
9827 - RainSong SG Shorty Gloss Shorty Series
7974 - Rainsong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
15259 - Rainsong SMCX Smokey Series
15257 - Rainsong SMH Smokey Hybrid
5257 - Satori YD18EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
8234 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic, Vint Nat
5255 - Satori YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
14251 - Takamine EF508KC NEX Cutaway Electro
15359 - Takamine EG540SC Electro Acoustic, Used
12236 - Takamine EN20C Electro Acoustic
14253 - Takamine GD30CE Electro Acoustic, Nat
14257 - Takamine GF30CE Brown Sunburst
14261 - Takamine GY93E New Yorker Electro
15481 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D E
15494 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE PW
15492 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE BW
13295 - Tanglewood TPESFCEZS Electro Acoustic
14952 - Tanglewood TSF CE Black
14950 - Tanglewood Evolution IV TSF CE Red
14954 - Tanglewood EvolutionTSFCE Sunburst Gloss
14951 - Tanglewood TSF CE White
13459 - Tanglewood TW115 SSCE
4187 - Tanglewood TW40 OANE Orchestra
15498 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Black
15497 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Burgandy
15495 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Whiskey Gloss
15496 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, White
14947 - Tanglewood TWCR O Crossroads
13485 - Taylor 515CE Electro Acoustic, Used
14419 - Vintage Pilgrim VPG900 Mayflower Deluxe
8007 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
13399 - Vintage VECJ100 Jumbo Acoustic Black
13233 - Yamaha AC3M Electro Acoustic, Secondhand
14427 - Yamaha APX1000 Slimline Guitar, Natural
14434 - Yamaha APX700 II Thinline, Natural
14492 - Yamaha CPX1000 Electro Acoustic, Natural
6961 - Yamaha CPX700 Electro Acoustic Sandburst
14422 - Yamaha FGX720SC, Natural
14421 - Yamaha FJX720SC Electro, Sunburst
14420 - Yamaha FX310A Guitar, Natural
6966 - Yamaha FX370C Dreadnought Electro, Black
6965 - Yamaha FX370C Electro Acoustic, Natural
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel

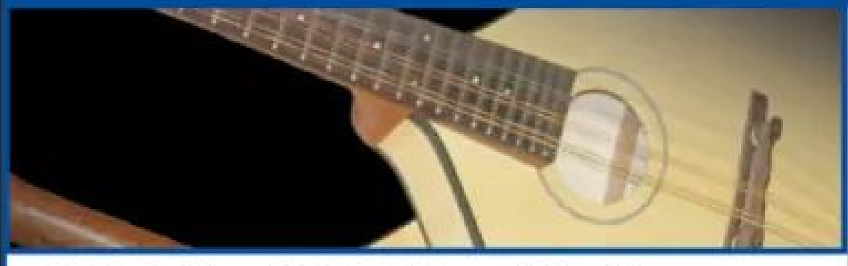
Classical Guitars

15241 - Admira A15 Classical Guitar
15240 - Admira A20 Classical Handcrafted Guitar
14922 - Admira Alba 4/4 Full Size Classical
13025 - Admira Malaga Classical Guitar, USED
8590 - Azahar Model 31A Classical Guitar
7365 - Jose Ferrer 3/4 Size Classical, Used
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C Classical
5360 - Ramirez 130 Year Aniversary Classical
6029 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model
6336 - Ramirez R2 Classical Guitar
15237 - Ramirez RA Classical Guitar
15238 - Ramirez RB Classical Guitar
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar
6441 - Roberto C2 Classical Guitar
10999 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Red
14720 - Yamaha C40II Full Size Classical Guitar
14721 - Yamaha CX40 Mark II Electro-Classical

12 Strings

13865 - Breedlove Pursuit 12 String Acoustic
13553 - Eko Vintage Ranger 12 in Black
14525 - Guild JF230-AB USA-Made, c1997
10991 - Tanglewood TRD12 Lefty 12 , Nat
15479 - Tanglewood TW145 12 SS CE
14398 - Vintage VE2000GG12 Giltrap 12-String
14349 - Vintage VE8000PB-12 Paul Brett

Mandolin Family



8826 - Ashbury AM-325 Octave Mandola
15437 - Ashbury Celtic Octave Mandola
15442 - Ashbury Rathlin Irish Bouzouki
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
15435 - Blue Moon Irish Bouzouki, Pear Shape
14028 - Breedlove Crossover OO O Hole Mandolin,
14500 - Breedlove Crossover Mandolin, VV
12540 - Fender FM63SE Electro Acoustic Mandolin
12568 - Fender Concert Tone "F" 63S Mandolin
14741 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin "A" 53S
15532 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin Pack
9240 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
4564 - Jimmy Moon A Plus Electro Bouzouki, Nat
4553 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin
9430 - Ozark Flat Back Bouzouki
15482 - Stagg M20 Mandolin Sunburst
8315 - Westcoast M20 Mandolin Sunburst
12347 - Westcoast M20S Mandolin Sunburst

Acoustic Amplification

0000 - AER - 15 Models in Stock
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
8166 - Fender Acoustasonic 150 Acoustic Combo
9166 - Loudbox Artist
4548 - Fishman Loudbox Mini - 60W, 1x6.5"
5286 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4"
13282 - Markbass AC101 Acoustic Combo
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
15059 - Marshall AS50D RED - 50W, 2x8"
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier
6505 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
5574 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
13018 - Tanglewood T3 30W Acoustic Amplifier
8108 - Tanglewood T6, 60W
14941 - Tanglewood TBA5 5 Watt Acoustic Amp
13471 - Tanglewood TXS Bass Sub
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

12564 - Barnes & Mullins BJ306 6-String Banjo
4371 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Banjo Ukulele
15147 - Blue Moon Tenor Ukulele Pear-Shaped
15398 - Deering Goodtime Tenor Banjo Ukulele
14557 - Deering Goodtime Ukulele Banjo
12420 - Fender '52 Tele Shaped Ukulele
9081 - Fender Mino' Aka Concert Ukulele
13616 - Fender Piha'ea Soprano Ukulele
12800 - Kala KA-BNJ/BK-C Concert Banjo Ukulele
9345 - Kala U Bass Electro Ac In Solid Mahogany
8127 - Kala U Bass in Mahogany
4722 - Kala U-Bass 2 Electro Acoustic Ukulele
13978 - Laka Concert Ukulele with GigBag
13979 - Laka Soprano Ukulele with Case
10372 - Magic Fluke M10 Concert Ukulele, Natural
13883 - Magic Fluke M30 Flea Sop Uke, Mahogany
15394 - Magic Fluke M90W Firefly Walnut BanjoUke
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
15457 - Mya-Moe USA Beansprout Banjo Uke, Used
13679 - Nukulele "Abbots Digit" Bottle Ukulele
13684 - Nukulele Autumn Gold Bottle Ukulele
13680 - Nukulele "Brown Ale" Bottle Ukulele
13681 - Nukulele "Helles Bier" Bottle Ukulele
13683 - Nukulele Lemonade Bottle Ukulele
13682 - Nukulele Slainte Bottle Ukulele
8515 - Ohana BK20 Baritone Ukulele
12610 - Ohana BK22 Baritone Ukulele
12609 - Ohana BKB35E Bass Ukulele
13633 - Ohana CK15BK Concert Ukulele, Black
13634 - Ohana CK15BL Concert Ukulele, Blue
9050 - Ohana CK20CE Concert Uke
8513 - Ohana CK50MG Concert Ukulele
8508 - Ohana PK10S Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
8516 - Ohana PK25G Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
13637 - Ohana SK10GN Soprano Uke, Matte Green
13636 - Ohana SK10YW Soprano Uke, Matte Yellow
13644 - Ohana SK12 Soprano Ukulele
4711 - Ohana SK20S Soprano Ukulele Uke
14210 - Ohana SK21M Premium Mahogany Sop.
13626 - Ohana SK22 Soprano Ukulele
8517 - Ohana SK22Z Sop Ukulele Zebrawood B&S
13642 - Ohana SK23 Soprano Ukulele
4710 - Ohana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
14211 - Ohana SK70BA Spruce & Morinda Sop Uke
14508 - Ohana SK70L Soprano Ukulele
14212 - Ohana SK70WG Soprano Uke, Willow B & S
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
13311 - Ohana Concert Uke Gig Bag
13312 - Ohana Tenor Uke Gig Bag
13310 - Ohana Baritone Uke Gig Bag
5009 - Ozark Ukulele Banjo
12740 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Resonator Ukulele
10384 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, UKS363MP
10385 - Risa UKS385MP Solid Concert Electro Uke
15476 - Risa Tenor Ukulele Electric Tenor-Uke
10424 - Uluru Lehua I Soprano Ukulele
15385 - Vintage Banjo Ukulele, Used
12376 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele

Travel & Tenor Guitars

8846 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar
8851 - Ashbury AT24 Tenor Guitar
15434 - Ashbury Tenor Guitar, Flamed Oak
13550 - Eko Mini Evo EQ Travel Guitar In Natural
15344 - Faith Nomad Mini Neptune
15345 - Faith Nomad Mini Saturn
15500 - Fender Sonoran 3/4 Mini Acoustic Guitar
14473 - Luna Safari Henna 3/4 Size Travel Guitar
14472 - Luna Safari Starry Night 3/4 Travel Guitar
15432 - Luna Safari Tattoo
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
13324 - Martin LX Red Little Martin
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
15439 - Martin LXK2 Little Martin Travel Guitar
9588 - Tanglewood TW15 Baby All Solid Travel
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel
15503 - Dimavery RS300 Resonator Guitar, Used
14615 - Dobro, circa 1975, Original Vintage
14530 - Gibson Dobro USA Made Resonator, Used
12737 - ResoVille Parkville MS12 Single Cone Nic
12730 - ResoVille Burbank MT12 Tri-Cone, Nickel
12732 - ResoVille Burbank MT12 Tri-Cone, Gold
12731 - ResoVille Burbank MT12 Tri-Cone, Red Cop
13244 - ResoVille Edgewood WS12R Maple Parlor
12738 - ResoVille Lincolnwood WS12 Reso, Maple

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

C.F. MARTIN & CO.
OMC-18E

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Martin
Model: OMC-18E
RRP: £2549
Body Size: 000
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Bridge: Ebony
Neck: Select hardwood
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Tuners: Nickel open gear
Nut Width: 1 3/4"
Scale Length: 25.4"
Onboard Electrics: Fishman Aura VT Enhance
Gig Bag/Case Included: Ply Hardshell

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Great electro sounds and a punchy mahogany voice
Cons: Not many, it's just not quite as good as some of its siblings
Overall: More limited in scope than the GPC-35E, but still a top quality instrument

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ✪✪✪✪
Sound Quality: ✪✪✪✪
Overall: ✪✪✪✪

CONTACT DETAILS

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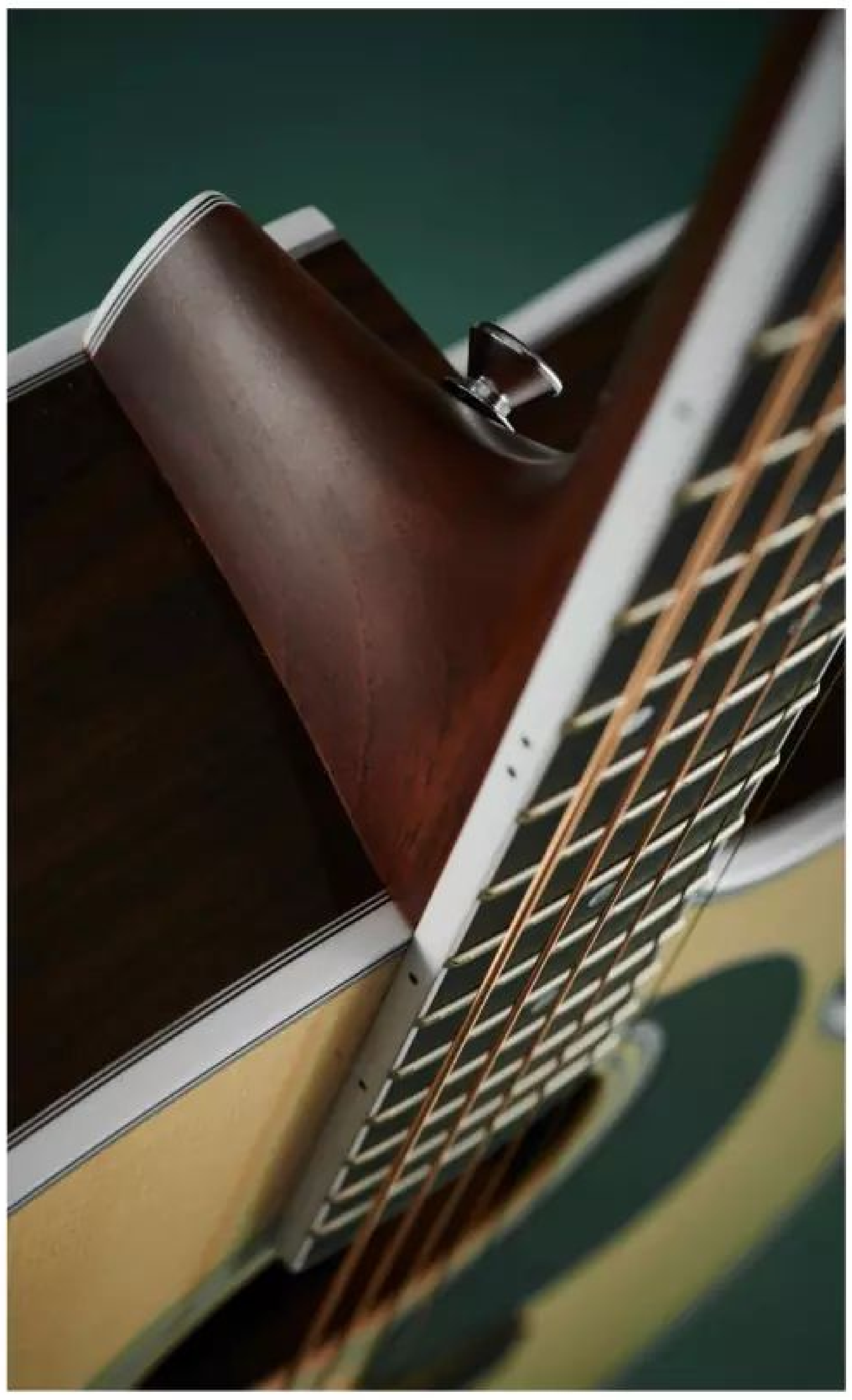

certainly these units sound a level above your average piezo system, in line with some of the units featured by the likes of Taylor, as one example. There were definite differences between the two guitars, with the OMC accurately carrying across its penchant for mid-focused tones and the GPC retaining much of its clarity and precision in the higher and lower frequencies. Overzealous use of the tone control with the enhance option did sometimes result in a bit of a woolly, muffled tone, but thanks to the simplicity of the controls it's easy to find the sweet spot that works for you.

Martin may be one of the old guard but there's no doubting that these two acoustics present some fresh ideas when it comes to live performance. The new Aura VT Enhance system is a very capable performer that makes it possible to carry much of your acoustic's natural tone to the stage. Yes, it's possible to get a better tone through other means, but that kind of set-up doesn't boast the same 'plug and play' level of accessibility. Not to mention the extra cost.

I couldn't help but feel that the GPC-35E presented better value for money despite the higher price tag. The tones were more immediately expressive and detailed to my ears, and I found that of the two this was the one I gravitated to more often than not.

The OMC-18E however is still a sterling guitar in its own right and will likely tick all the right boxes for fans of mahogany-backed OM models.

Both guitars prove that Martin still has its finger on the pulse, and in my mind completely justify the refreshing of an iconic line-up of instruments. It says it all that my first thought upon packing away the two guitars was that I'd desperately like to try every last guitar in the series. Whatever the latest development or revision, Martin guitars will always be some of the most playable and enjoyable guitars you're ever likely to play. If you're a gigging guitarist in the fortunate position of considering a purchase at this level, then the new standard series is absolutely the best place to start. ■

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ACOUSTIC

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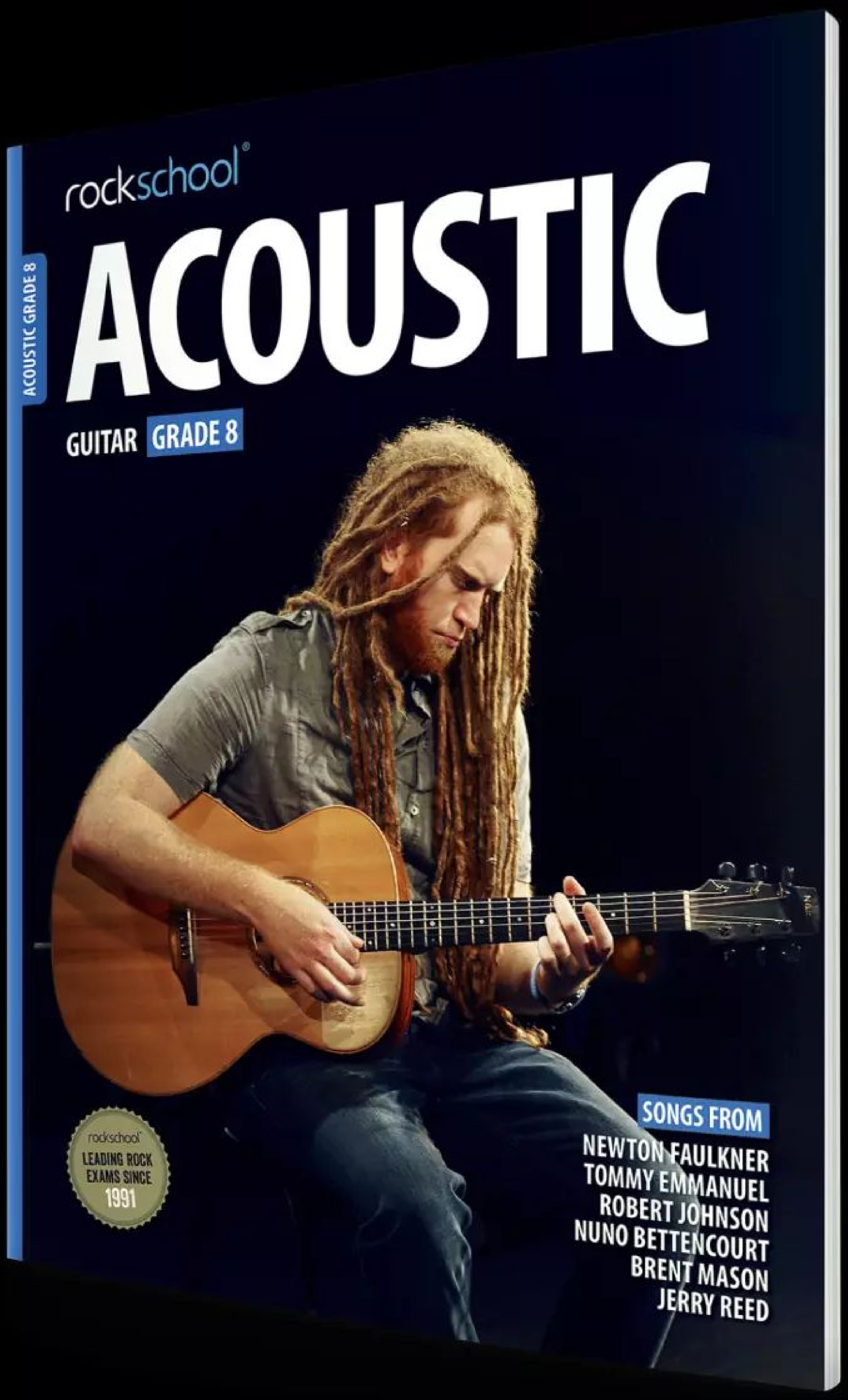

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Andy Jones masterclass: rearranging and accompanying on acoustic guitar
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TAYLOR 714CE

The American mega-luthiers Taylor have recently boosted their 700 range with this £3000 tone monster. Joel McIver readies his lasso

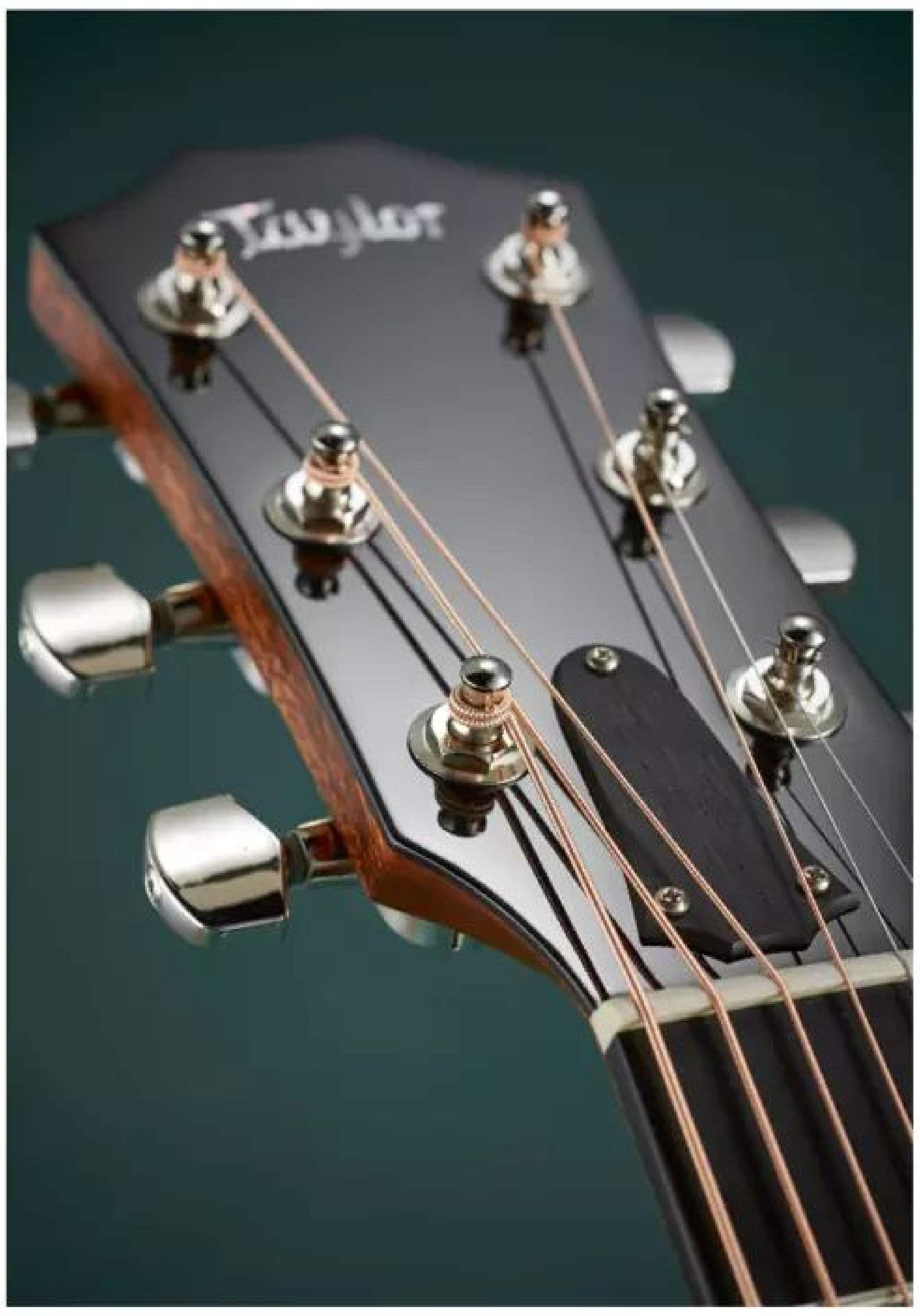
WORDS: JOEL MCIVER **IMAGES:** NEIL GODWIN

Back in 2010, this hallowed magazine sent me to interview Taylor Guitars founder Bob Taylor over a cuppa at Harrods in London. The affable luthier was on fine form, telling me: "We are the number one seller in the USA of acoustic guitars from the price $599 to $1000. We are also the number one seller of acoustics over $1000. And we are the number one seller overall in terms of revenue, but we sold fewer units than the nearest competitor by 33 per cent, which means that we sold way more high-end guitars than they did. So that means we occupy the mid-price and the high end of the market. It's a wonderful place to be!"

Bearing in mind that he told me this when we were still in the worst economic recession since the Cretaceous extinction event, that's quite a success story. Six years later, Taylor (both brand and chap) shows no sign of slowing down: Taylor tells us that sales revenue is up 66 per cent from 2010 to 2015. So quality and customer satisfaction must be at the core of the company's approach, one assumes, or people wouldn't be buying their guitars in such massive quantities – all of which leads us to review the new 714CE variant with keen anticipation.

First off, you'll be paying in the region of two grand for this guitar, so (like me) your first priority will no doubt be to check that the construction is pretty much flawless. Fortunately that's exactly what it is: from the slick Sitka spruce top, rosewood back and sides and that curvaceous Venetian single cutaway, the body is a genuine thing of precision-engineered beauty.

The details (and Taylor's American factory and staff, of course) are where you're paying that wedge of money, of course, so you'll enjoy running your eyes and fingers over the Hawaiian koa binding, the herringbone rosette made from a Douglas fir/maple composite and the weathered brown pickguard, intentionally designed to look like leather.



"The neck is splendid: a slick but not slippery vehicle for expression, whether you're playing fingerstyle, pick or a combination of both"

The 20 frets, 14 of which are accessible before the upper bout, sit perfectly on the ebony fingerboard; tone-enhancing protein glues have been used throughout; and even the interior bracing, which you can see through the soundhole adjacent to the circuit board for the electronics, has been designed for extra performance. You can't help but want to plug in and make the most of Taylor's ES2 preamp, fed by the behind-the-saddle Expression pickup and regulated by three unmarked control pots.

You know those glossy magazines called *Girth* and *Thrust* and whatever, whose readership is wealthy accountants in their 50s with vintage sports cars, big watches and expensive aftershave? This guitar would fit that demographic perfectly. Take from that what you will.

Our 714CE arrived tuned to D, unusually, so I played it in that tuning out of the box. I'm glad I did: with a full, rich and rounded range of tones thanks to all that rosewood and the addition of Sitka spruce, the guitar plays easily and responsively. The low end is especially impressive, with bass and low mids all behaving themselves through a sequence of heavy-strummed barre chords and blues bends. (Fact: I used a plank-sized 1mm pick given to me by Yngwie Malmsteen.)

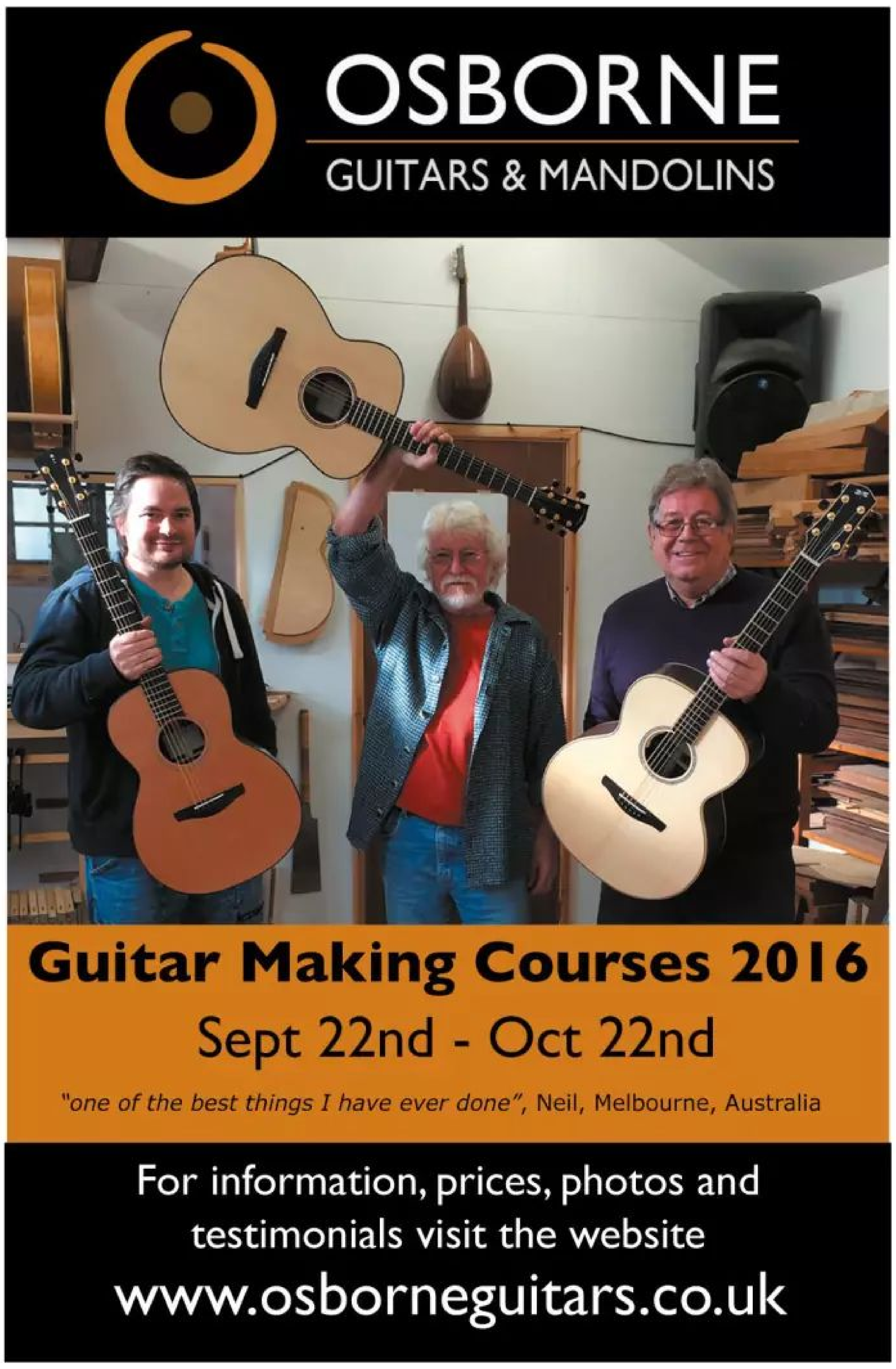
Tune up to E with the aid of those slick-performing machine heads and the mids and highs are more prominent, while arpeggiated chords stand out with glassy precision. Pick closer to the bridge and you'll be rewarded with a taut, zingy tone and picking feel that doesn't sacrifice volume for top end – very satisfying indeed. The sustain is everything you'd want, although you'll need to experiment with different string brands and gauges to hit the exact feel you're after.

The neck is splendid: a slick but not slippery vehicle for expression, whether you're playing fingerstyle, pick or a combination of both (show-off). The shape of the neck joint chamfering means that high-

> ***"The designers have prioritised function over form while still creating an attractive instrument"***

register chords are enabled, even rooted at F# on the 14th fret of the bottom E string. You'll be in acoustic heaven before you even plug in.

When you do go electric via the rear strap button, the tones of the guitar come to life. It's a medium-volume instrument, so you might not need an amp for a small room, but assuming you're in need of those extra decibels, Taylor's Expression system will earn its name. The bridge is where the action is, with three pickup sensors lurking behind the saddle, with the tones tweakable by the three controls. At this price, I would like to have seen a more advanced user interface: unmarked pots look cool, but if you're playing on a dark stage and need a touch of tone in a hurry, you don't necessarily want to be playing guess-which-button. There's also no onboard tuner, which blows my mind.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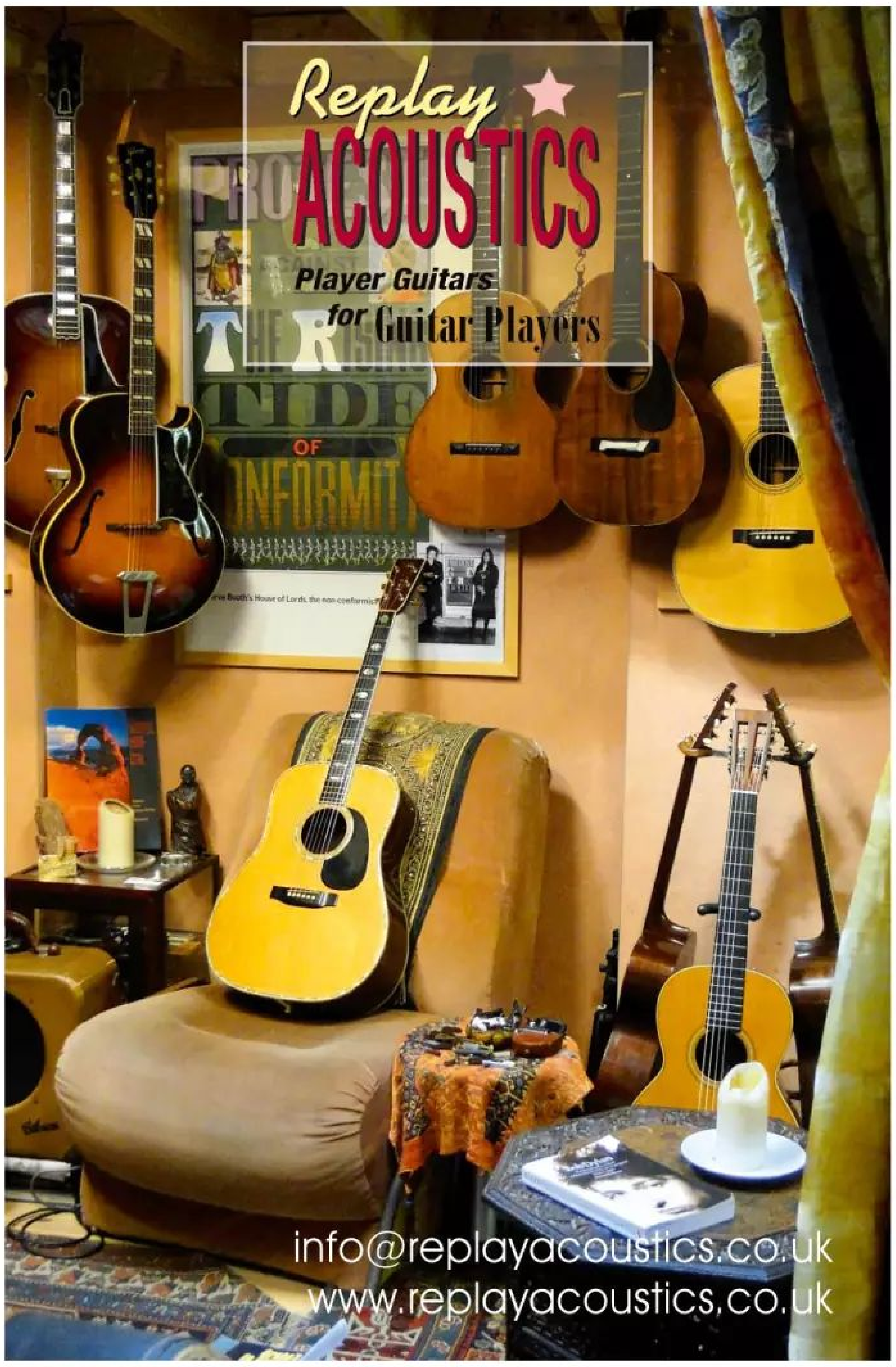
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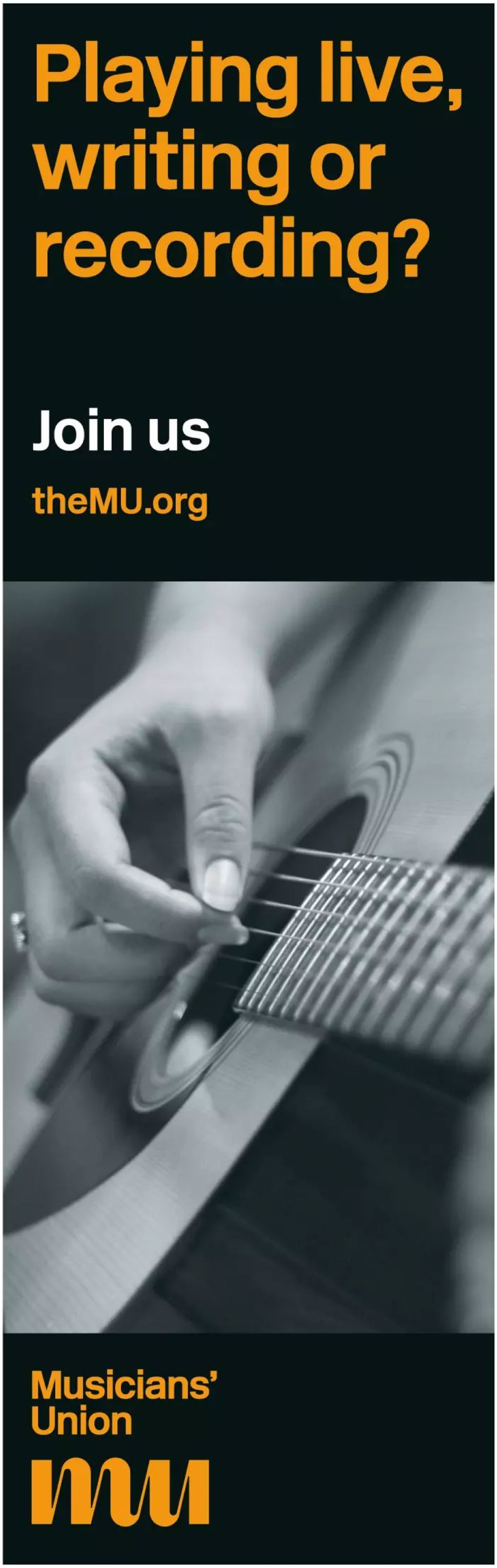
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"I can easily imagine the Taylor 714CE matching up to the demands of stadium playing"

TAYLOR 714CE

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Taylor
Model: 714CE
RRP: £3141
Body Size: Grand Auditorium, single cutaway
Made In: USA
Top: Lutz spruce
Back and Sides: Indian rosewood
Bridge: Taylor with behind-the-saddle pickup
Neck: Tropical mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Tuners: Taylor Nickel
Nut Width: 1 11/16"
Scale Length: 25.5"
Onboard Electrics: Taylor ES2 pickup and preamp
Strings Fitted: Elixir Phosphor Bronze HD Light
Gig Bag/Case Included: Taylor case included

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Tone range; super-playable neck; world-class build quality
Cons: Preamp options could be more advanced at this price; no onboard tuner
Overall: A splendid all-rounder for a lifetime of playing

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★★
Sound Quality: ★★★★½
Overall: ★★★★★

CONTACT DETAILS

www.taylorguitars.com

Get past those small-ish hurdles and you'll come to enjoy the full range of tones available with a quick twist of the controls. I can easily imagine the Taylor 714CE matching up to the demands of stadium playing, assuming feedback scenarios are managed as they would be for any acoustic performance, while the frequency range and responsiveness would also make it ideal for recording purposes.

It's performance-friendly, too: that super-playable neck comes with a front strap button, which is something that is still relatively uncommon in the world of acoustic guitars.

From the serial number printed on the inside label, to the considerate neck and that clever pickup, the impression which the Taylor 714CE gives you is that the designers have prioritised function over form while not forgetting to create a physically attractive instrument. Other guitars exist at this price point, and in fact their names read like a list of the great and the good of the acoustic industry: Lowden, Eggle, Martin and Gibson all make guitars at or near the price of this American beauty. Go for this one, though, and we can't really imagine you being less than delighted with it... as long as you've got a tuner handy. ■

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COLLINGS 2H TENOR

Are four strings the new six? And is there space in the market for a high-end tenor guitar? Stephen Bennett believes that the answer to both questions is a comprehensive yes

WORDS: STEPHEN BENNETT **IMAGES:** OLLY CURTIS

Few luthiers balance the aesthetic and tonal relationship that captures the essence of 'form and function' quite so skilfully as Bill Collings. Maybe coming from a long line of engineer ancestors is what's enabled him to master the complex art of keeping it simple. These days – the expanding Waterloo range being a case in point – there's a sense that, given the classic, minimalist design of, say, an Eames chair or a Coke bottle, Ol' Bill would be figuring out new ways to cut down on all that unnecessary flash.

And, as if to test that very theory, his latest retro/state-of-the-art venture – the 2H – suggests that, when it comes to strings, four might well be the new six. Guitar players of all stripes (and luthiers like Roger Bucknall at Fylde, in particular) are getting serious about these highly versatile yet oft-neglected little creatures and with the 2H in hand, it's not hard to see why.

Initially devised as a more orchestra-friendly (though equally loud) variation on the tenor banjo, the CGDA/GCEA-tuned tenor guitar became a feature of Hawaiian and country acts during the 1930s before giving way to the bigger voiced, six-string-accompaniment needs of the emerging folk-revival and the musical tsunami of vocal duos and soloists that followed. Just about every major manufacturer of note had a go – Gibson, Martin, Gretsch, Guild, National et al – though, these days, tenor-seekers are more likely to find a resonator model lurking in the local dust-emporium than a stylish, all-solid tone-wood option. That's changing. More and more "I'll give this a try" budget models are appearing, while, right at the other end of the scale, as here, those who've been smitten can, once again, get to sample the good stuff.

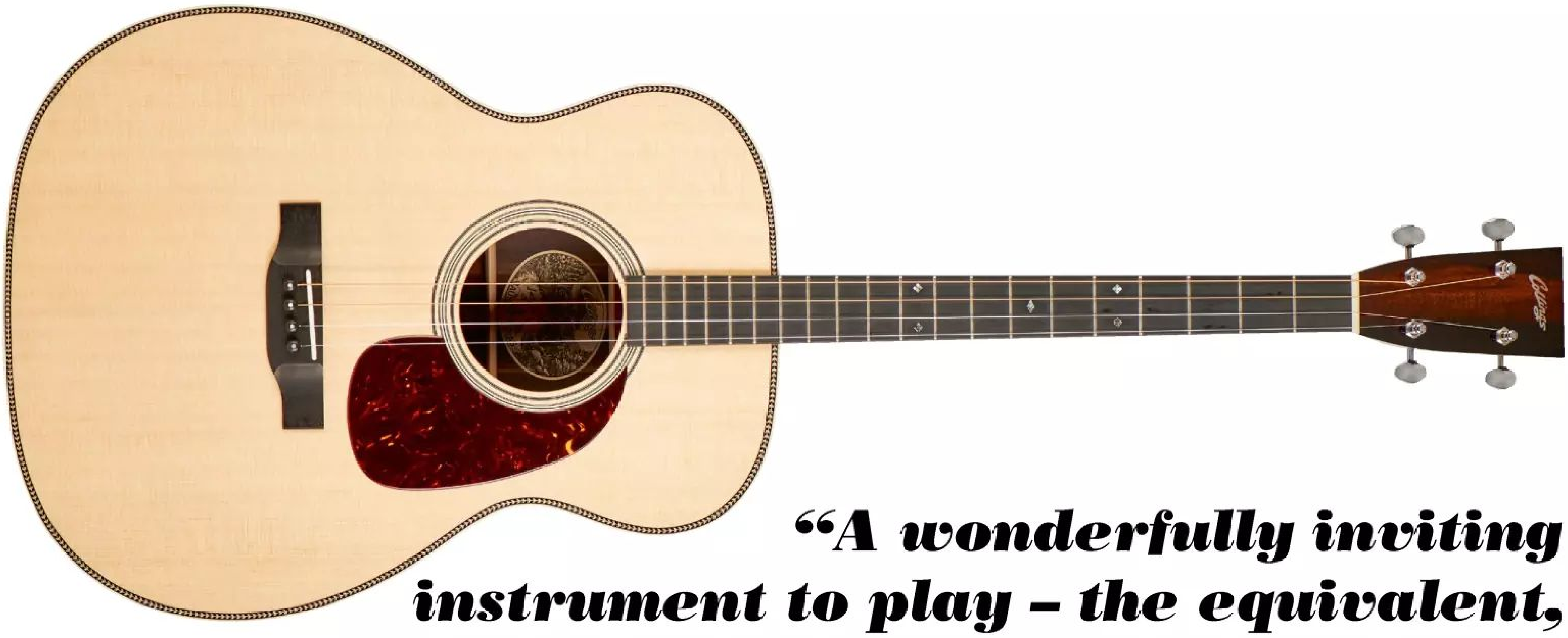
Nonetheless, there's still a suspicion in some guitar circles that the tenor of the species can sound 'thin'. After all, other instruments tuned in fifths (the mandolin family, for example) rely on double-course strings to provide the necessary extra sonic oomph and, furthermore, should you opt for the popular alternative GCEA-tuning (requiring fatter strings, since you ask), it just becomes a big ukulele, anyway. One 1924 Martin catalogue even advertised its tenor models under the clunky moniker of "Uke-I-Tars". So what's the point? Easy. There's always been as much room inside the musical marquee for a full-on Handel's "Messiah" as there is for a Son House 'a cappella' blues; both equally fabulous, totally different, and warranting neither comparison nor self-justification. Likewise, the little 2H packs more than enough clout to speak for itself, be it deployed either in a solo setting or as part of an ensemble.

"Unlike other short-length instruments, it delivers a cut-crystal quality in the higher register whereby notes seem to float and shimmer like blown bubbles"

Collings tenor guitars first appeared – to considerable acclaim – at the California NAMM show in 2014 and, based on the winning 'ain't-broke-so-don't-fix' formula, not a lot has changed in the two years since then. For those unfamiliar with the Collings story, though, he's been building acoustic instruments since the early 70s, Bill Collings launched his current (Austin, Texas) set-up in 1992. Since then, the company has built a reputation for maintaining consistently superb, handmade quality while expanding both range and output to factory, as opposed to workshop, levels. Its work demonstrates a meticulous attention to detail that's never been compromised.

Bill Collings himself is evangelical about the level of craftsmanship that goes into his instruments and tone aside, the overall, immaculate finish on Collings instruments has become something of an industry benchmark, even for 'single-builder' luthiers.

And so to the current specimen. First off, there's nothing 'plain' about the neat, squared-off headstock; its rich, auburn sweep glowing warm within the deep, cocoa brown of the ebony veneer, providing an ideally understated setting for the company's elegant script logo. Similarly, and in line with the overall 'trad' aesthetic, both the ultra-smooth, Waverly chrome tuners and the classic, mother-of-pearl 'diamonds and squares' fret position markers (plus side dots), give another faithful stylistic nod to the banjo/orchestra era.



"A wonderfully inviting instrument to play – the equivalent, 'feel-wise', of a favourite 'sofa-guitar'"

COLLINGS 2H TENOR

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Collings
Model: 2H Tenor
RRP: £3775
Body Size: Tenor
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Indian rosewood
Neck: Honduran mahogany
Fingerboard: Ebony
Nut Width: 1 9/32"
Scale Length: 23"
Strings: D'Addario EXL, .10-.35
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hard case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

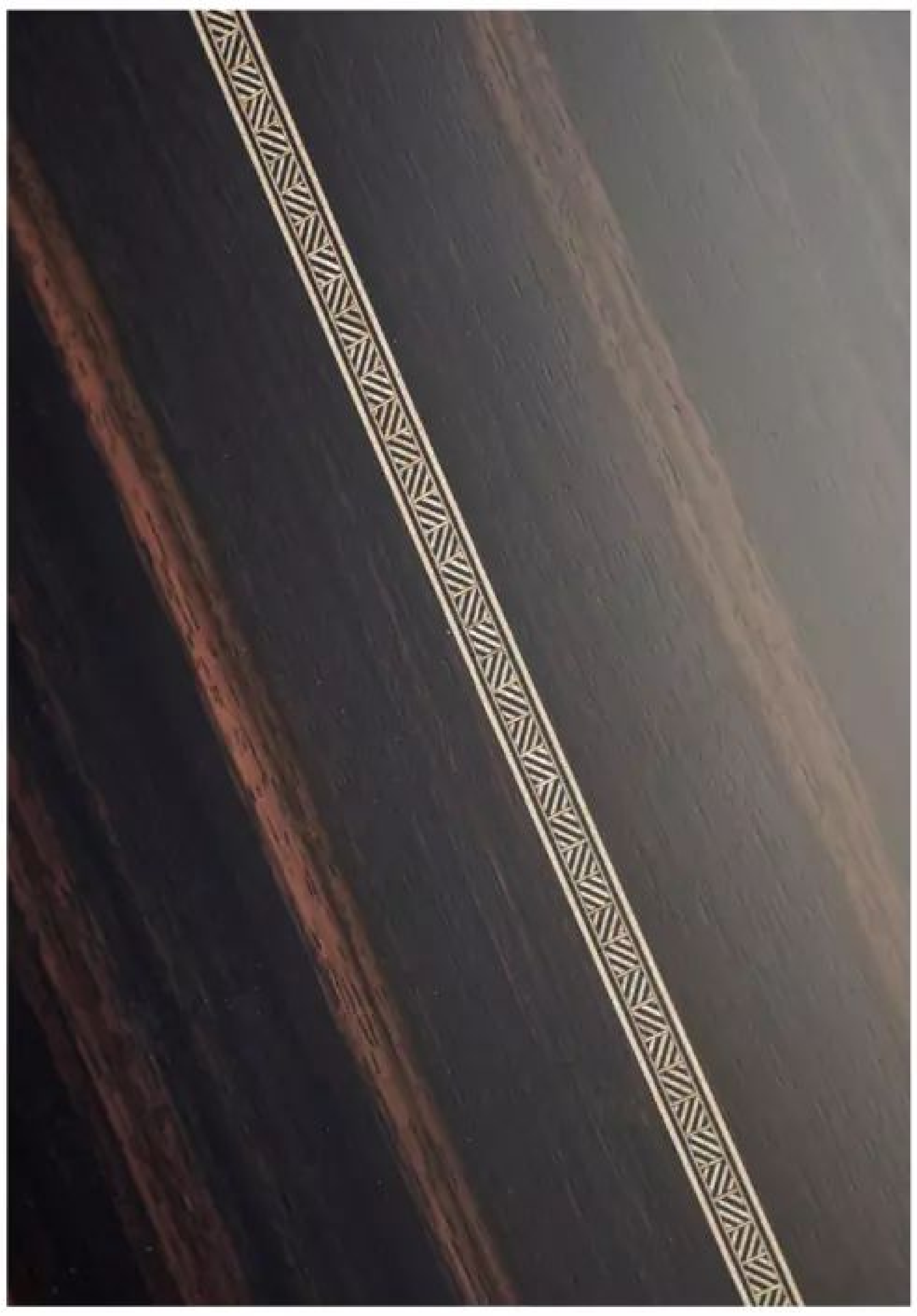
Pros: Immaculate build and the promise of boundless new musical horizons
Cons: A bit pricey unless this is to be your main, dedicated instrument
Overall: Compact, classy and highly covetable – a real beauty

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Sound Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Overall: ✪✪✪✪✪

CONTACT DETAILS

www.collingsguitars.com



The left hand soon grows accustomed to the tenor's narrower fingerboard, partly due to the meaty, deep round contour of the mahogany bolt-on, broom-handle neck. The H stands for 'herringbone' and the antique, scrimshawed ivory colouring of the binding and back-strip comprises the one conscious concession (two with the creamy, Ivoroid heel-cap) towards decorous adornment here.

The Sitka spruce top is a smooth, light-grained shade of Rice Krispy with a soundhole rosette featuring a fittingly unfussy cluster of concentric black and cream inlayed rings. The pearl-dot end-pins hint at the tiniest touch of decadence, while the Indian rosewood back is made up from a beautifully matched set; the even, widely-spaced brown stripes conjuring images (for this shameless reviewer, at least) of that ever-notorious 1970s Coventry City away kit. The big difference here being that this actually works. The flat-shouldered body shape that accommodates it so stylishly is a variation on the early Martin models and a design currently unique to Collings.

It's a wonderfully comfortable and inviting instrument to play – the equivalent, 'feel-wise', of everyone's favourite 'sofa-guitar'. It's both light (though not insubstantial) and very loud. Don't just think tenor-toting Seth Lakeman and galloping, 'nu-folk' chord-work here; this is an ideal vehicle for hitherto unexplored avenues into Celtic fingerstyle, blues, classical and even bluegrass. Also, a swift YouTube investigation (though you may wish to linger) of the great American master, John Lawlor, will reveal a jaw-dropping, virtuoso insight into the tenor's potential for fabulous big-band style jazz and swing.

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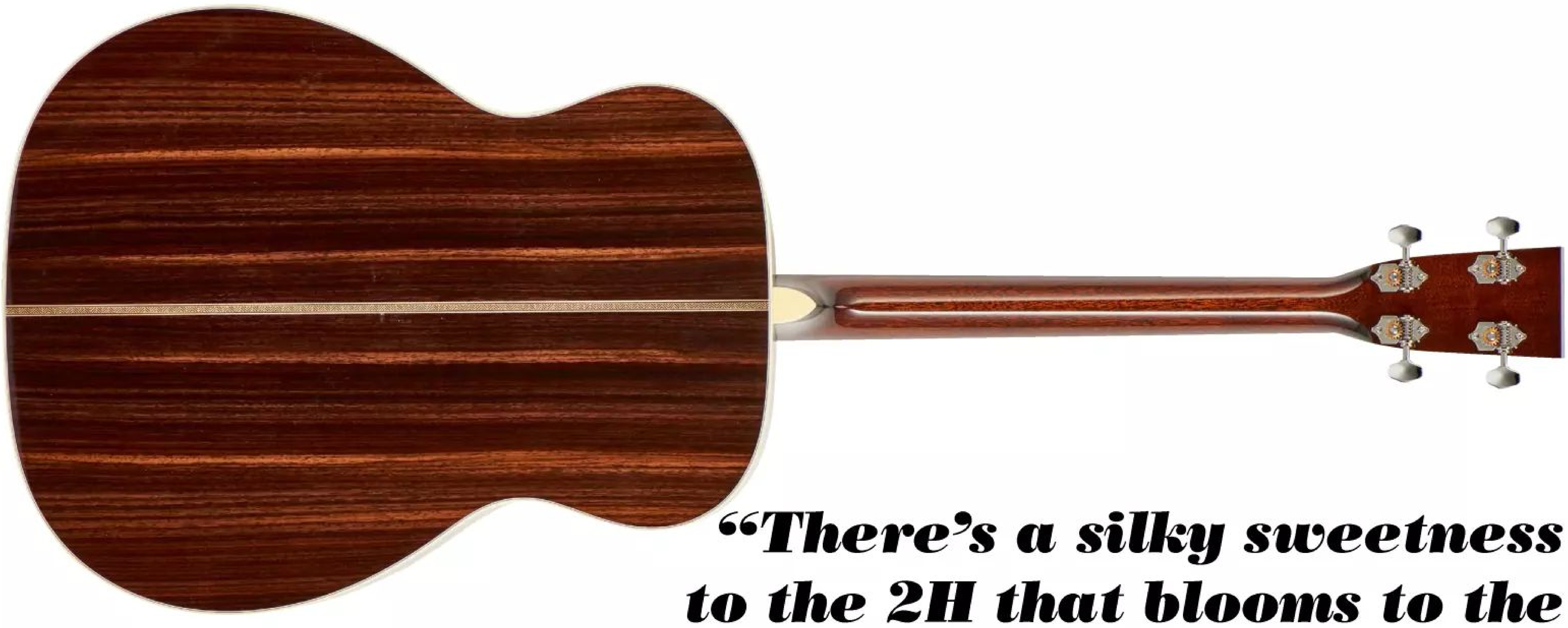

> **"There's a silky sweetness to the 2H that blooms to the most delicate fingerstyle balladry"**

Individual string clarity and note separation are something you'd expect with any high-end instrument (especially one with only four strings), but with the 2H it's truly exceptional. There's great sustain, be it via fully barred chords or single notes right up the neck, and a satisfyingly subterranean thump to the bass that never upsets the wonderfully even tonal balance. Stylistically, if it works on a mandolin family instrument, it can work here. The bonus comes in having that repertoire channeled through an instrument that feels and plays like small-bodied guitar – though unlike many short-scale-length instruments, the 2H delivers a chiming, cut-crystal quality in the higher register whereby notes seem to float and shimmer like blown bubbles. Much of that brightness is down to the spruce/rosewood but – and here's that familiar "all in the build" mantra once again – while a plectrum will make it ring like a banjo-struck bell, there's also a silky sweetness to the 2H that blooms to the most delicate fingerstyle balladry.

With fewer strings to add volume and tonal "weight" – and because of the nature of its tuning (there's always a supporting drone string somewhere) – a tenor invites hammer-on/pull-off styles perhaps more readily than any other instrument in the extended guitar family. And if, for example, Americana is your thing, try opening up a whole new, bluegrass-tinted world of opportunity by tuning down to an Appalachian dulcimer-like CGCG. The 2H accommodates it perfectly and, let's be honest, what could be more fun than creating twice the impression while deploying half the technique? There's also the bonus that with its treble strings thus loosened, the 2H takes on a warmth and fullness that offers even greater possibilities for vocal accompaniment.

One way to look at the role of the tenor guitar – almost inevitably a second instrument choice for the majority of us – is as a bridge between the differing creative potential and technical challenges of the guitar versus the mandolin. It feels like a guitar and has a similar tonal response yet it works like a mandolin via a tuning, fingering and chord-voicing system that leads the player down paths more familiar to classical and traditional musicians. It's an instrument that adds extra colour to the player's palette not just in itself but in the new compositional avenues it can open up on that same player's return to his or her 'customary' instrument. There are cheaper options out there but, inevitably, as with the finest basses – and even ukuleles – fewer strings, when dealing with this level of quality, doesn't equate to a reduction in cost. Besides, with his own deep love of 'cheap' guitars (as outlined in these pages before), Bill Collings is big on value and the ever-trustworthy "you get what you pay for" consistency he advocates is perhaps unmatched in any other company this size.

It almost goes without saying then, that this elegant, clean-limbed little tenor is a genuine class act. And if, at first, it speaks a different language, don't worry, guitarists, you'll soon be fluent – if for no other reason than the Collings 2H is almost impossible to put down. ■

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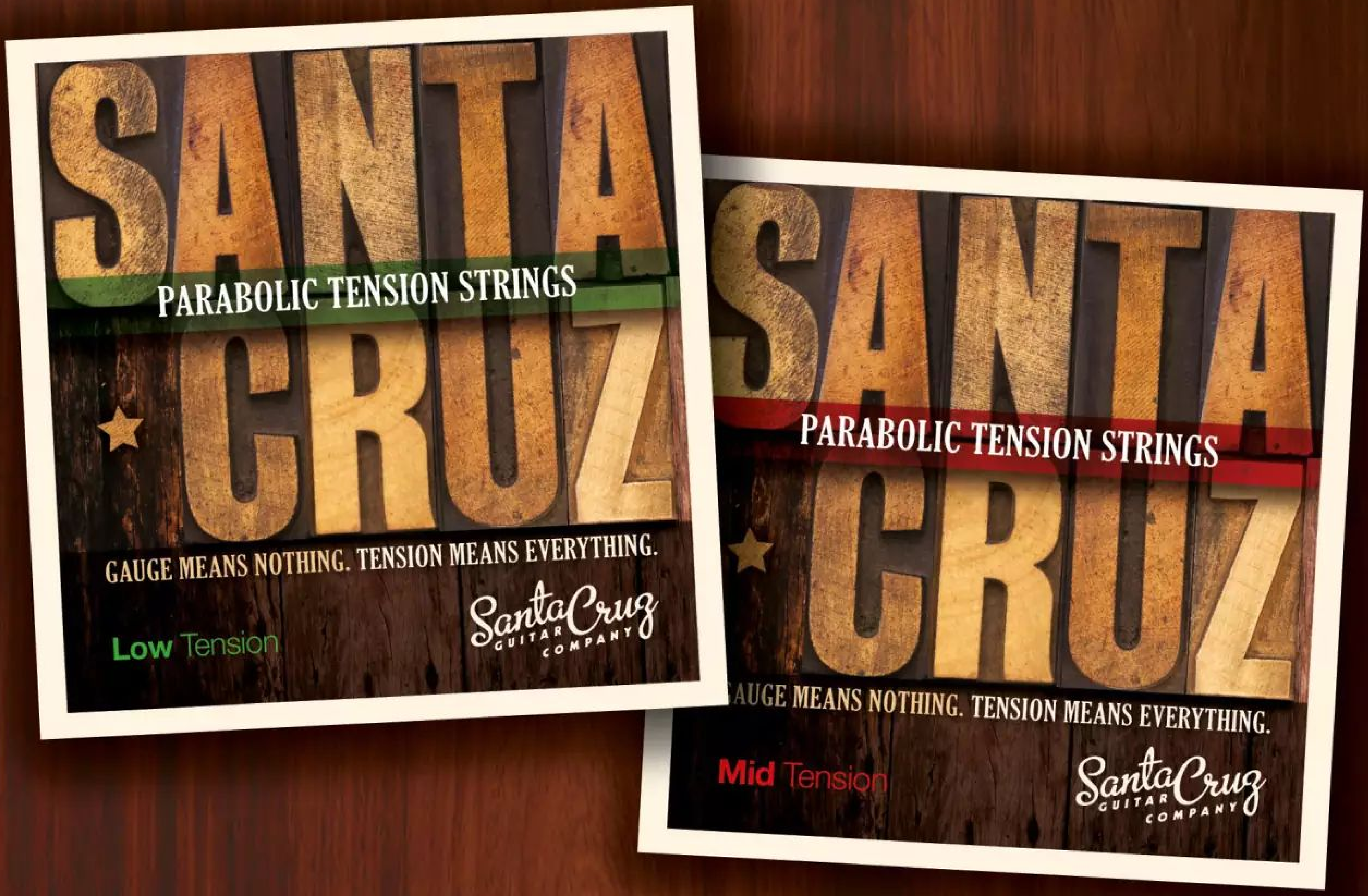

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ROZAWOOD BARITONE

In a review that he's sure isn't anything to do with his name, Alun Lower finds out how...er, low you can go with Rozawood's beautifully crafted baritone

WORDS: ALUN LOWER **IMAGES:** NEIL GODWIN

Considered a 'niche' instrument by some, baritone acoustic guitars seem to have become slightly more 'mainstream' in recent years, with a few credible budget options cropping up alongside some exceptional high-end offerings from big-name brands like Taylor. And when you're competing with names such as that, independent builders often have to strike a balance between artistic flair and functional practicality, with some examples appearing far too ornate and fussy for their own good and others sticking too closely to the tried-and-tested.

Rozawood has clearly thought about this a great deal, and the baritone guitar presented here is quite different cosmetically from the default model pictured on its website. As a big fan of baritone guitars and other instruments with an interesting twist on the standard six-string, I can't wait to see if Rozawood can strike this balance in the same way as the world's biggest guitar brands. And maybe, just maybe, surpass them.

Handmade guitars from skilled – if slightly less well-known – luthiers are always an exciting prospect, but even so I don't think I was expecting the Rozawood to look quite this good. Even the gold standard spruce top has a lovely bearclaw effect to it – beautifully detailed but with a nice tight and even grain. The back and sides are composed of figured ebony sapwood, with a slice of flamed maple in the middle for good measure. It's a wonderfully luxurious blend of woods, but a combination that doesn't feel too ostentatious. The soundhole features a convex rosette that is borrowed from Rozawood's 'Mastervoice' dual-soundhole guitars, a system that aims to increase projection for both the audience and the guitarist. There's no second soundhole here, so how much effect this actually has is up for debate, but there's no denying it looks distinctive and is exceptionally well crafted.

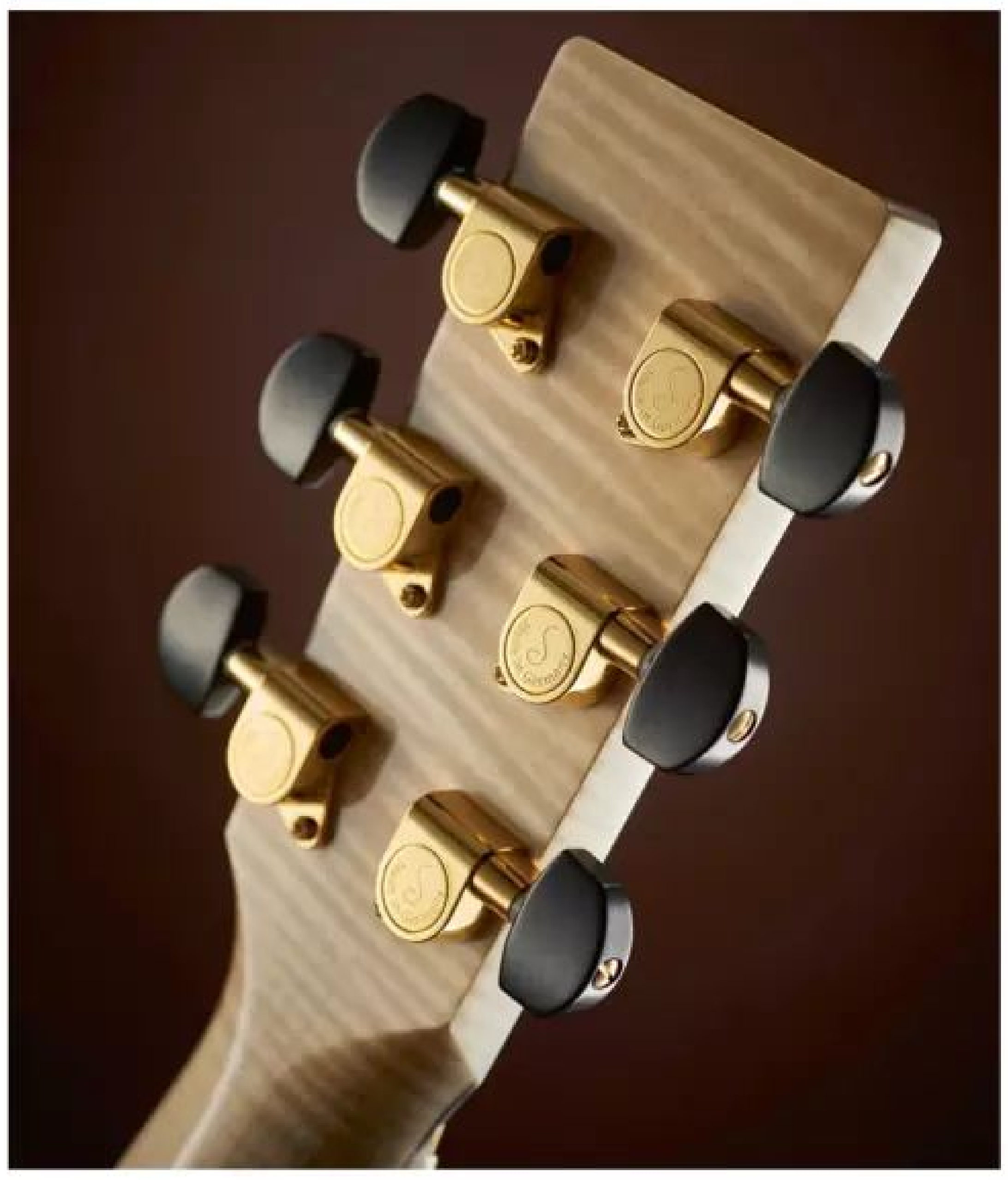
Elsewhere we're treated to a streaky black and brown ebony fingerboard partnered with a flamed maple neck, a really fetching swamp oak pickguard and beautifully implemented herringbone purfling resting atop flamed maple binding. It might not be immediately obvious from the pictures, but there's also a subtle armrest fashioned into the top along the upper bout – a touch that genuinely makes a noticeable impact on playing comfort without being quite so dramatic-looking as the equivalent on other high-end instruments. Then you've got a set of gold Schaller tuners with ebony knobs and a bone nut and saddle completing the feature list.

> **"It's a rare joy as a guitarist to come across an instrument that has been built with care and attention in every fibre of its being"**

There are no electronics to speak of, which may trouble some gigging guitarists, but this can't take away from the fact that Rozawood has built an absolutely incredible looking instrument here. Every single detail is crafted to the last millimetre of perfection. Everything lines up, there's not a hint of sloppy workmanship to be found, and it's all been designed with a keen eye. It's a rare joy as a guitarist to come across an instrument that has been built with care and attention in every fibre of its being, and that's exactly what you get here. This is top-drawer stuff.

Seeing as this is a purely acoustic instrument, it's vitally important that Rozawood backs up the stunning craftsmanship of this guitar with a similarly excellent tonal performance. Thankfully, this guitar delivers in spades. I'm a sucker for baritones and have been fortunate to test examples at every price point, and I think I may have just found my new favourite. From the very first note, the Rozawood is all about clarity, precision and dynamics. The lowest note clangs clear and loud in that gloriously piano-like way, providing a beautiful low end foundation for both chord work and fingerpicking passages. Bass-lines feel so much more pronounced, with an almost vocal-like quality to it, where the attack and picking tool (whether that be the flesh of your fingers or any variety of pick material) have a profound effect on the overall tone, but in a controllable, expressive way.

That's not to say that the higher tones are shabby either – such passes are equally crisp and defined, with a glassy, shimmering overtone that adds yet more detail to your overall tone. It might sound like a bit of a



ROZAWOOD BARITONE

Manufacturer: Rozawood
Model: Baritone
RRP: €4420
Made In: Czech Republic
Top: Bearclaw alpine spruce
Back and Sides: Ebony sapwood
Bridge: Ebony
Neck: Flamed maple
Fingerboard: Ebony
Frets: 20
Tuners: Schaller M6
Nut Width: 45mm
Scale Length: 28 1/2"/724mm
Onboard Electrics: None
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hiscox

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Outstanding build quality and an enchanting tone
Cons: Other than a lack of electronics and the price, nothing
Overall: A superb baritone that arguably justifies the expense. Exceptional.

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Sound Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Overall: ✪✪✪✪✪

CONTACT DETAILS

www.rozawood.cz

"This is a guitar that you just won't ever tire of listening to"

cliché, but there really isn't an awful lot you can do with this guitar that doesn't sound fantastic. Every style of play is perfectly viable – it's just delivered with a deeper, richer voice. It's an addictive quality, and transitioning back to a more traditional acoustic afterwards, it sounded shrill and flat by comparison.

You may have already gathered, but I rather enjoyed my time playing the Rozawood Baritone. In fact, I think it might be the best baritone guitar I've ever played. What you've got here is a stunningly beautiful instrument, executed perfectly by a guitar maker that truly understands their craft. More than that, the playability is superb, arguably faultless. And most importantly of all, this is a guitar that you just won't ever tire of listening to. Even at this early stage of the guitar's life, before the woods have even settled, the tones on offer are up there with the best that I've heard.

The only downside to a potential buyer is the lack of electronics, which does limit this guitar's potential in terms of the out-of-box product. But you could easily argue that a guitar this good deserves a quality microphone anyway, and that's certainly the road you'd go down if you were planning to record with it, regardless of any extra technology offered.

The fact is that there really isn't anything about this guitar that I don't love, other than the price tag of course. If you're looking for a guitar in this price range though then I really can't recommend the Rozawood Baritone enough – it's an extraordinarily rewarding instrument to play and to listen to. Just do me a favour, and don't pay me a visit if you do buy one. I'm not sure I could handle the jealousy. ■

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THINKING **INSIDE** THE BOX

UK luthier Nick Benjamin strips back the complexities of the acoustic guitar and gets to the root of the question: where does the sound come from?

WORDS & IMAGES: NICK BENJAMIN

Last month I described the guitar as a 'machine' that transforms the virtually silent vibrations of the strings into vibration of the air, or 'sound'. Then I explained that the sound we hear is not just gushing from one source – the soundhole – but is actually a (hopefully) beautiful mixture from several places. The complex vibrational 'dance' that an acoustic guitar does as it transforms the vibration varies from design to design and from individual guitar to guitar, and it is this that gives each instrument a distinctive personality or character.

It may be argued that it is actually this variation from one instrument to the next that is one of the most appealing aspects of the guitar compared to other instruments, and it's why people often become so attached to a particular instrument whose 'sound' fits with their idea of how a guitar should sound – at least when it is played by them. Perhaps we should describe our guitar as our 'dance partner', to continue the metaphor, since the player is at least half the equation when we are trying to ascertain how a particular guitar 'sounds' and is probably why no one can ever entirely agree on how this or that design or type of wood sounds. Or, perhaps, to slightly misquote: talking about guitar sound is like dancing about architecture.

Let's get back to how the 'machine' works. A string's aerodynamic shape slips through the air, so it sustains well but doesn't transfer much energy to make the air vibrate. To push and pull on the air we need something that doesn't slip through the air – we need a larger surface area that can move back and forth and 'fan' the air at the right rate to produce strong 'sound-waves'. Enter the soundboard. In order to make the soundboard vibrate back and forth at the same rate as the string that is producing our 'note' we need to attach the string to it and we need to turn the side to side vibration of the plucked string into the back and forth motion the sound-board needs to produce to push and pull on the air next to it.

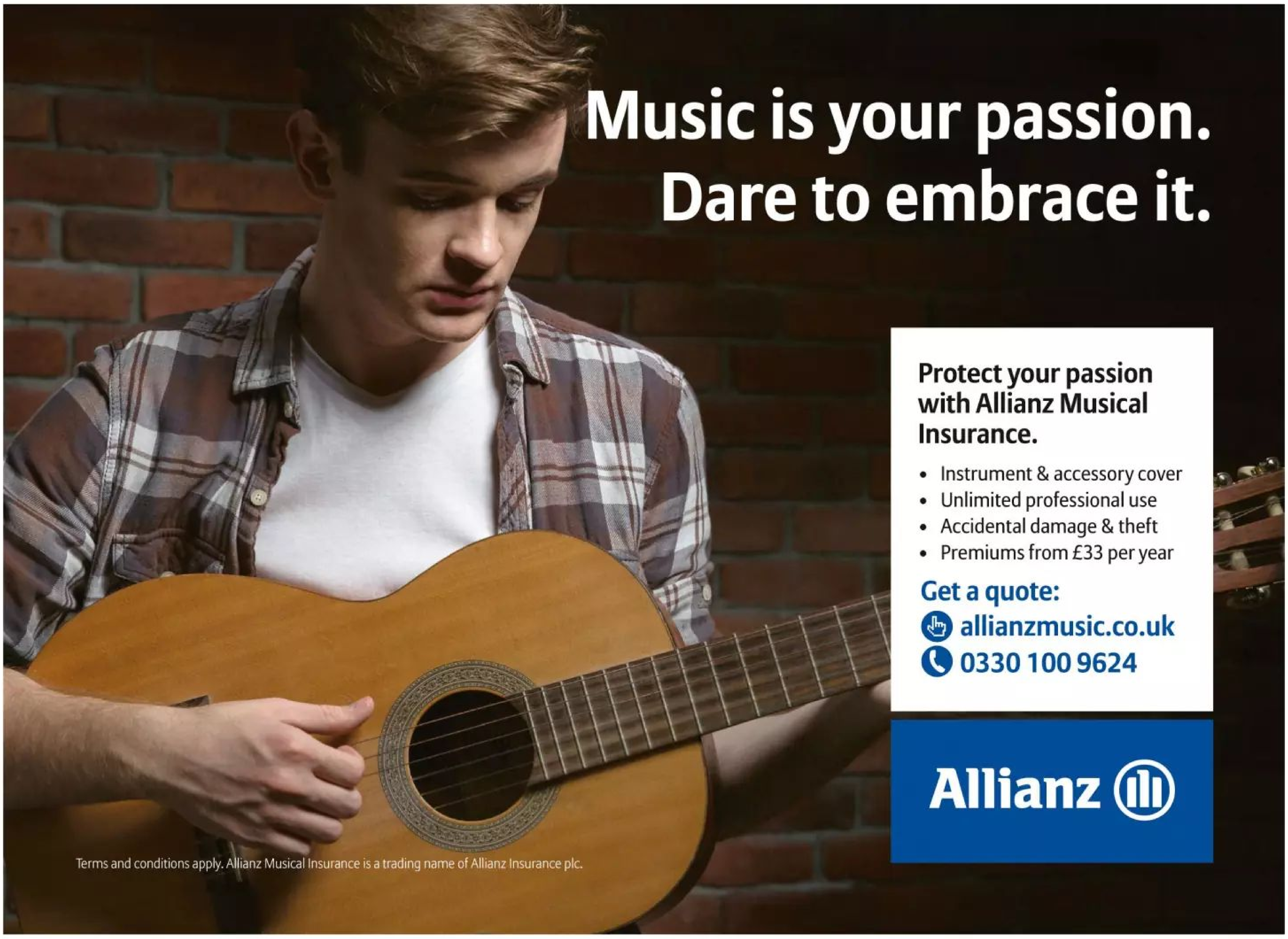
As we are all well aware, the strings are attached to the soundboard via the bridge. The bridge has several functions: the first is to provide a strong, hardwearing attachment point for the strings, the second is to provide a definite end-point from which the strings start to vibrate via the 'saddle' and the third, perhaps less obvious function, is to act as a lever that transfers the strings' vibrations to the sound-board in a 'cranking' action. As the string vibrates from side to side its tension increases as it goes off to one side and then comes back to its neutral tension and then increases again as it goes off in the other direction – this is very simplified but it illustrates the mechanism. This variation in tension tugs at the top of the saddle and exerts leverage on the soundboard, thereby transferring the vibrations quite efficiently.

There is also a subtler effect caused by the weight of the strings producing a direct back and forth 'swinging' motion rather than the implied rocking of the bridge by the tugging or cranking action. However too much of this can lead to an out-of-control guitar with strings that buzz easily and can be thought of as a symptom of a soundboard that is built too lightly.

So, we have transferred the side-to-side vibration of the string into a form of back-and-forth vibration of the soundboard, and because the soundboard has a large surface area it can't slip back-and-forth easily in the air – in fact the air gradually robs the soundboard of its pulsing energy and stores that energy as soundwaves or variations of air pressure.

When those waves meet our ear-drums – which are much like mini sound-boards with nerves instead of strings attached – some of the pulsing energy is transferred and we 'hear' the guitar!

So, why do we need the rest of the guitar – the soundbox and the soundhole? I'll come to that next month! ■



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MONKEY TALK

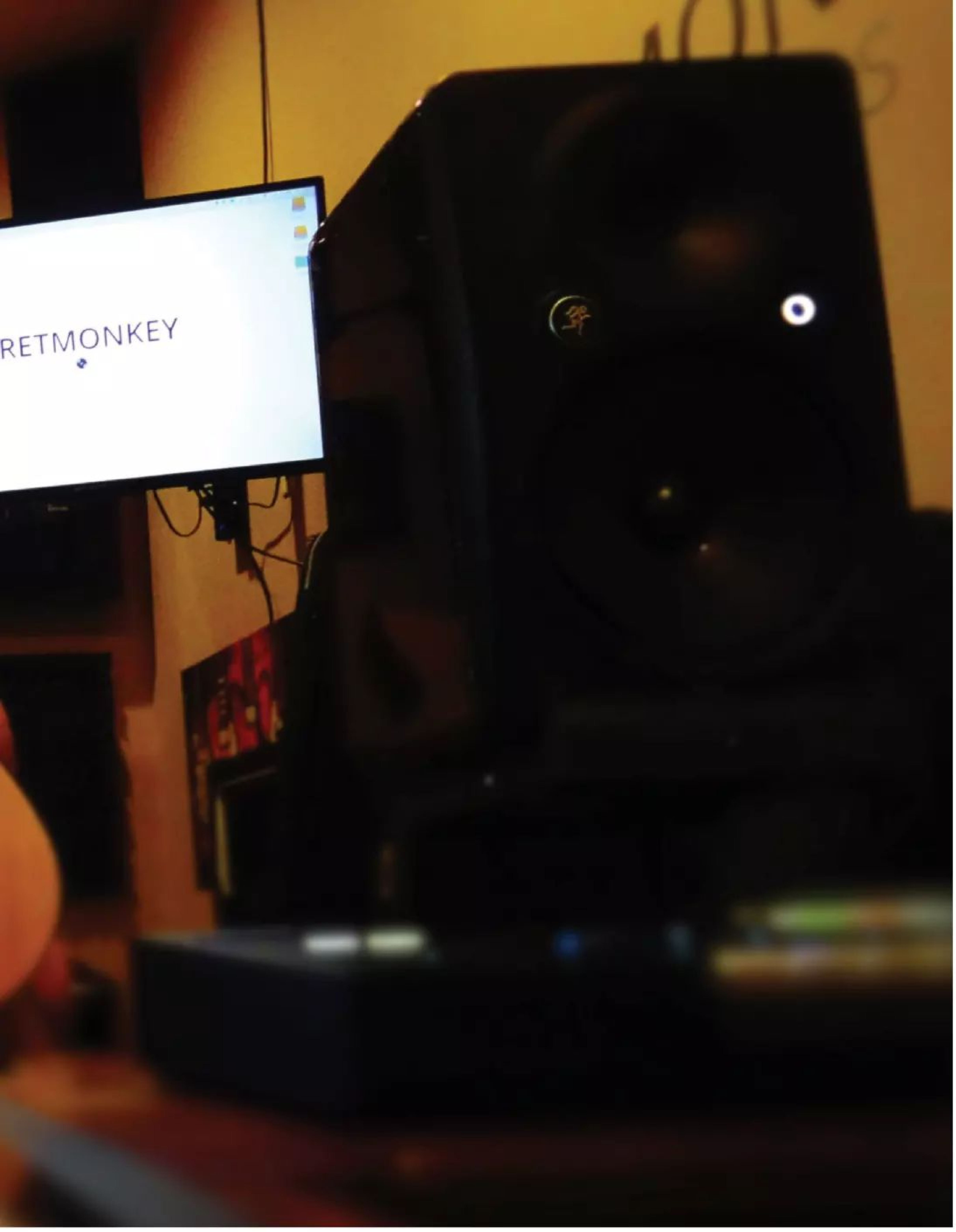
Canada's Fretmonkey label exists with one goal in mind – to place acoustic artists squarely in focus, while handing ownership of their music directly to them. Joel McIver meets label owner Blake Goodwin

The Conway, Arkansas record label Fretmonkey was set up in 2015 by guitarist Blake Goodwin and his stepfather Dennis Cotabish with an admirable set of goals. As many recording musicians reading this will know, the traditional record-label model doesn't exactly place the creator of a piece of music front and centre, in terms of the trickle-down of income, at least. The idea behind Fretmonkey was to change that model, setting up an artist-run and artist-focused organisation that reverses the usual situation.

It all started, Goodwin tells us, when he scooped the prestigious Canadian Fingerstyle Guitar Competition in Kingston, Ontario – even though he was relatively new to the fingerstyle discipline. "The CFG is North America's most progressive competition in terms of fingerstyle," he tells us. "I sat with my guitar and figured out the footsteps of guitar players like Andy McKee, asking myself where their careers had taken them, and the CFG was the biggest competition that everyone went to."

"I went in blind!" he laughs. "I didn't have a spot reserved: I was only able to compete because another artist didn't show up. I was able to win it, even though it was my first year ever playing fingerstyle. Going into it was scary, but with that being said, by winning it I was able to connect with all these different people who have really helped with setting up Fretmonkey."

With over 20 acoustic artists already signed up to the label, Goodwin is amazed and gratified at the speed with which his label has taken off. The company's clear vision of doing something outside the norm has clearly resonated with the acoustic audience. "We want to be known as something different, being an artist-led label," he says. "It's a great thing for musicians who find it hard that labels own all their music, and also for acoustic artists in general, for whom things are really tough right now. One of our biggest goals right now



is to expand and cross-connect globally, so with the amount of artists being involved, we're getting involved with all sorts of competitions and festivals in different areas."

Gear is another way in which Fretmonkey can help the acoustic community, he explains. "We hook up with guitar companies and pedal companies to help our artists get involved on all different sides of the loop. We're going out to China and other countries, and cross-promoting with each other to get the artists the exposure they need. We want everybody to succeed, both as individuals and as a whole under the Fretmonkey banner. We have a lot of tours coming up, and we're all working together real hard to make this happen."

The home hub of Fretmonkey is the label's eponymous studio in Conway – a full-service audio and music video production experience that essentially serves as a one-stop location for the needs of professional musicians, as well as up-and-coming artists. All Fretmonkey artists have access to half-priced audio and video production, as well as promotional, touring and management services, while remaining a part of an artist collaboration model and serving on the label's advisory board.

"The venture has been mainly self-funded," says Goodwin. "So much of this has been to do with me going around North America over the past year, competing in guitar competitions and meeting people. I kept hearing from acoustic musicians that they couldn't get on a label – exactly the same thing that I was going through myself – and also that people didn't know how to grow their career further after a certain point. After talking to them, I told them about our studio down in Arkansas, and they asked if they could come together and make a label.

"It's been trial and error, but we've had a lot of success – and it's been really exciting. People have embraced us on social media and it seems like we're always in communication with artists, helping them out. It's been awesome. Get in touch!"

Info: www.fretmonkeyrecords.com

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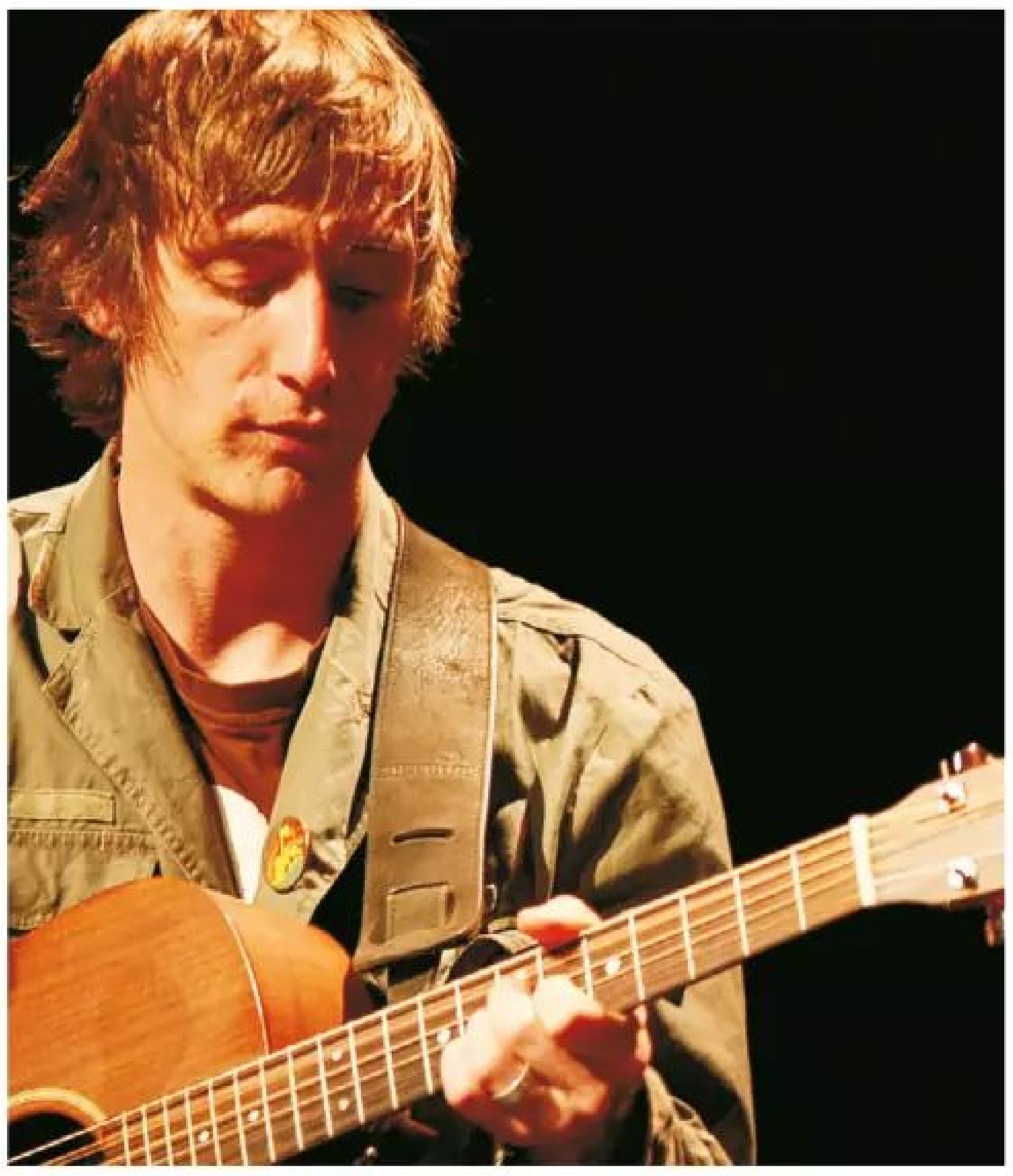
CERA IMPALA

STYLE…(HILLBILLY NOIR/SWING JAZZ)

Born in Flagstaff, Arizona, I've moved around the USA, lived in Berlin, and now find myself in Edinburgh. My group – the New Prohibition – consists of myself, my long-time musical partner Dirk Ronneburg on fiddle, and Joey Sanderson on upright bass. Although I play guitar, our new album, *Tumbleweed*, is guitar-free because the collection didn't include any songs written on that instrument. Banjo, ukulele, double bass, accordion, harp and fiddle produce an amazingly full sound. Is there a theme? Tumbleweed is an unusual plant. It looks dead, but it's the furthest thing from it. It roots when the wind is steady and un-roots when the winds come, scattering new seeds and going wherever it can to live. I find strength in this as an allegory for my life. My regular banjo is a custom job from Ome Banjo of Colorado. It's woody, with gorgeous brass fittings and tone ring. The overtones are magic – it makes me play softer with more dynamics than ever before. I don't use effects, but I have a nice crisp condenser mic – an AKG C1000 – on my instrument. It gets the job done in a pinch. I have two ukuleles – a solid Koa Uluru tenor, and a steel Johnson. Because I have the low G on my tenor, it's better for supporting my voice. Jazz standards and certain kinds of fingerpicking are better on the steel uke. Between the two I've got a lot of ground covered. I play a Taylor 512 Engelmann spruce-topped concert guitar. It's great for fingerpicking, flatpicking and has a brilliant balance. Alternate tunings? On banjo, many; on guitar, DADGAD and sometimes G. What inspires my songwriting? Nature. Love. Magic. I write songs to heal my heart – and hopefully someone else's too. I've got two albums ready to put in the can just now and I begin recording again in winter. I'm also developing a duet project with Lake Montgomery that we're calling Delightful Squalor. I'm excited about singing with another American dreamer.

www.ceraimpala.com



MARK BLOOMER

STYLE…(ENGLISH FOLK/ROOTS)

Broom Bezzums is a duo comprising myself (guitar, mandola and drums) and Andrew Cadie (Northumbrian small pipes, fiddle and guitar). Occasionally we're joined by vocalist Katie Doherty. We've been described as 'Germany's most famous English folk band', as we've been touring there for over 10 years now, with TV appearances and regular radio play. *No Smaller Than The World* is our latest album – the title comes from a lyric in Katie's song 'Passing Through'. My favourite track is my own song 'Down By The River'. Recording it wasn't easy, as it has personal feelings attached to it, but Katie's contribution is beautiful. 'Keep Hauling' – a shanty written by Andrew – was covered by Show Of Hands on their latest album, which was an honour. We've supported them in Germany and the UK and have a lot to thank them for. They helped in our development as a band. I'm a drummer by nature – drums were my first love. I played with indie band Drop and was an original member of Babylon Zoo. I taught myself guitar through experience, throwing myself into it. I currently play a Martin D-15 mahogany acoustic. I like it because it feels and sounds like a guitar a drummer should play. It has lots of bass and is pretty robust. I also have an Oakwood octave mandola, which has a huge sound with lots of bass. I play with an LR Baggs iBeam pickup through a Boss EQ and an Orchid DI box. Live, we like a lot of sub and bottom end, as I also play a bass drum on stage. Songwriting is new to me – it's only recently I found the courage to write. Songs usually come out in the rush of a creative moment, I can't sit down and write at will. At the moment we're touring and playing the new album live. In October we're at the Costa del Folk festival in Portugal. We're also planning a UK tour for March 2017.

www.broombezzums.com

© Andrew Thompson Photography

TIA MCGRAFF

STYLE… (AMERICANA/FOLK)

Currently based in southern Ontario, Canada, I spend most of my time touring internationally with my husband, Tommy Parham, who also produced my latest album, *Crazy Beautiful*. My last release, *Break These Chains*, was a outpouring of raw emotion through story and inspirational songs. *Crazy Beautiful* is in some ways richer and bolder. The title track was inspired by the story of Canadian skier Sarah Burke, who was killed in a practice run. Is there a theme? Standing on the edge – arms open wide – falling in love – following your dreams – not giving a damn – but living your own life: crazy beautiful! My favourite track is 'The One I've Waited For', a beautiful Americana ballad that gets folks up dancing when we perform live. I play guitar and keyboard live, but Tommy played guitar on *Crazy Beautiful*. I would like to play guitar on the next CD. I play a Taylor Grand Symphony and a mini Martin. Both are acoustic six-strings. My Taylor is a beautiful rose brown, and the Martin is a honey gold. I enjoy playing both of them – each has a beautiful voice of its own. I like to use a fingerstyle picking on the Martin to add a mando type of highlight to Tommy's big bottom Guild, and also use a muted rhythmic strumming technique to add a percussion-like feel. Songwriting is a huge part of my joy in music making. Tommy focuses on the melodic hook and rhythm of the song, and I come in with the lyrics and melody process. I write most of my songs on the acoustic guitar. However, sometimes, a song calls to be written on a piano. What inspires my songwriting? Real life. Things people say, emotions, stories… I love telling stories through my songs. Right now, I'm excited to be working on songs for a film, and my next CD. Tommy and I have been touring the UK for 11 years, and I'm working on tours for February and May 2017.

www.tiamcgraff.com

STEVE MITCHELL

STYLE… (BRITISH FOLK/PUNK)

I'm the lead singer and rhythm guitarist with Weston-super-Mare band the Leylines. We formed after a visit to Sawmills Studio, Cornwall in late 2013. On the journey back, Matt Wilkins (guitar and backing vocals) and I listened to my favourite album of all time, *Levelling The Land* by the Levellers, and we decided that we wanted to form a band to play 'festival music'. We then enlisted the amazing talents of Hannah Johns (violin and backing vocals), Peter Fealey (bass) and Dave Burbidge (drums). We're extremely proud of our debut album, *Along The Old Straight Track*. It was recorded at the Levellers' studio, produced by the award-winning Sean Lakeman and mixed and mastered by Al Scott. All of the tracks have a personal meaning to me. The opening track – 'My Own Worst Enemy' – serves to remind me that life goes on, and you can become stronger and wiser as you continue your journey. My regular guitar is a semi-acoustic Yamaha CPX700 full body with cutaway, with a spruce top, rosewood back and sides and an ART pickup system. I've had it for around 12 years, and I've really put it through the mill. It's been hammered gig after gig and has never let me down. It does have a yearly MOT with a local luthier, though. And I have another of exactly the same spec that I use as a spare. I don't use any pedals at all. The guitar goes through a DI and into the desk. For the most part I use a plectrum – Dunlop .73mm nylon – as my playing style is mostly hard rhythmic strumming. Future plans? I'd like to think we'll be heading back to the studio in 2017 to record the second album. I'm also working on some solo stuff. After the festival season, we are heading back to the venue circuit. October dates include the Bierkeller in Bristol, the Marrs Bar in Worcester and Bostin Days at the Robin 2 in Wolverhampton.

www.theleylinesmusic.co.uk

EDDIE MARTIN'S BIG RED RADIO

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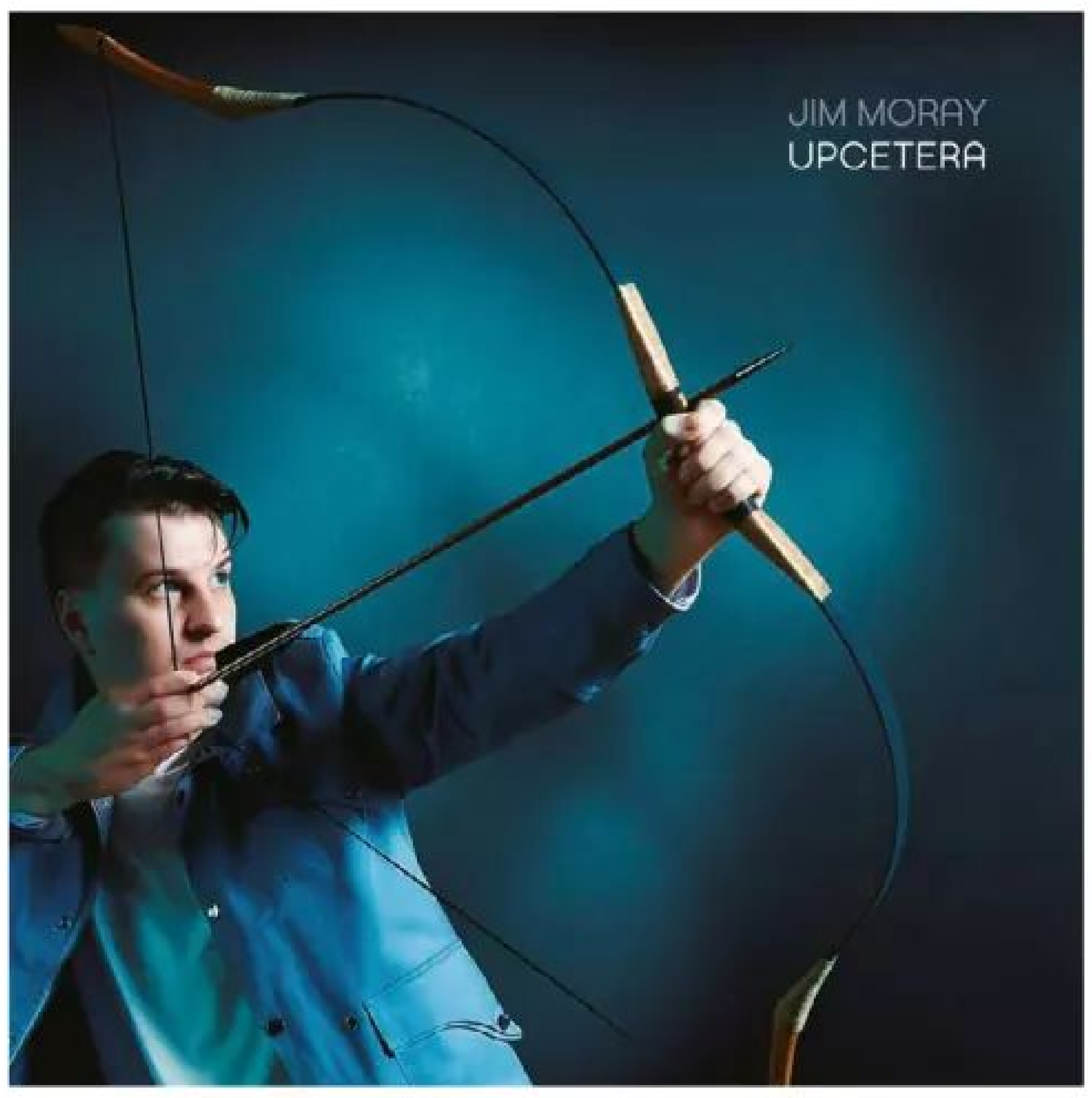
Never a man to have any truck with the thundering ugly side of modern day blues, whether popping up as a one man band, fronting a big band or getting down and dirty with an acoustic steel guitar, Bristol's Eddie Martin has always stuck to his guns in admirable style. Eddie truly leaves his peers choking in his slipstream on this live cut. From the hypnotic Delta trance of 'Flowers To The Desert' to the Paul Weller funk feel of 'Something About You Baby', boy does the man know how to roll. And just for good measure, there's a DVD of what was obviously a cracking concert. **JP**



JIM MORAY

UPCETERA

WWW.JIMMORAY.CO.UK

It's been 13 years since the golden boy of the English folk scene debuted with *Sweet England*, a release that, with its alternative approach to traditional music, confounded and delighted the folkies in about equal measure. Since that time Jim's pursued a quirky path owing as much to Blur as Cyril Tawney, and with *Upcetera* the journey once again unfolds in mysterious and occasionally – as on the lilting 'Edward Of The Lowlands' – darker realms. It's all very clever and meticulously arranged, and with the Unthanks supplying atmospheric strings, the overall effect is certainly impressive. **JP**

AL SCORCH

CIRCLE ROUND THE SIGNS

WWW.ALSCORCH.COM

From the rambunctious breakneck tempo of the opening song 'Pennsylvania Turnpike', this Chicago banjo-toting troubadour takes no prisoners. Backed up by empathetic musicians, who unflinchingly follow the twists and turns of Al's demented songs, the dashes of traditional country and bluegrass are all overlaid with a kind of sub punk sensibility. On paper it's a wacky combination, but somehow it all hangs together. Woody Guthrie's 'Slipknot', a chilling song ranting about the hangman, can't help but be memorable, and the melodious French horn introduction to 'Poverty Draft' might even bring a tear to your eye. Compelling stuff. **JP**

SETH LAKEMAN

BALLADS OF THE BROKEN FEW

WWW.SETHLAKEMAN.COM

With Ethan Johns at the helm, and young Devon female trio Wildwood Kin supplying haunting harmonies, Seth's choice of the great hall of a Jacobean manor house as a recording venue is an inspired choice. The result is an album of strangely organic beauty. On the title track, which begins with Seth's simple strummed guitar, Wildwood Kin add moaning backing vocals, before Johns adds some distorted electric guitar, bringing the track to a stirring climax. Elsewhere alongside seven originals, Seth serves up 'Anna Lee', a Levon Helm ballad, that's so down home you can almost smell the burnt oak and ripe earth. This is music bared to the bone and all the better for it. **JP**

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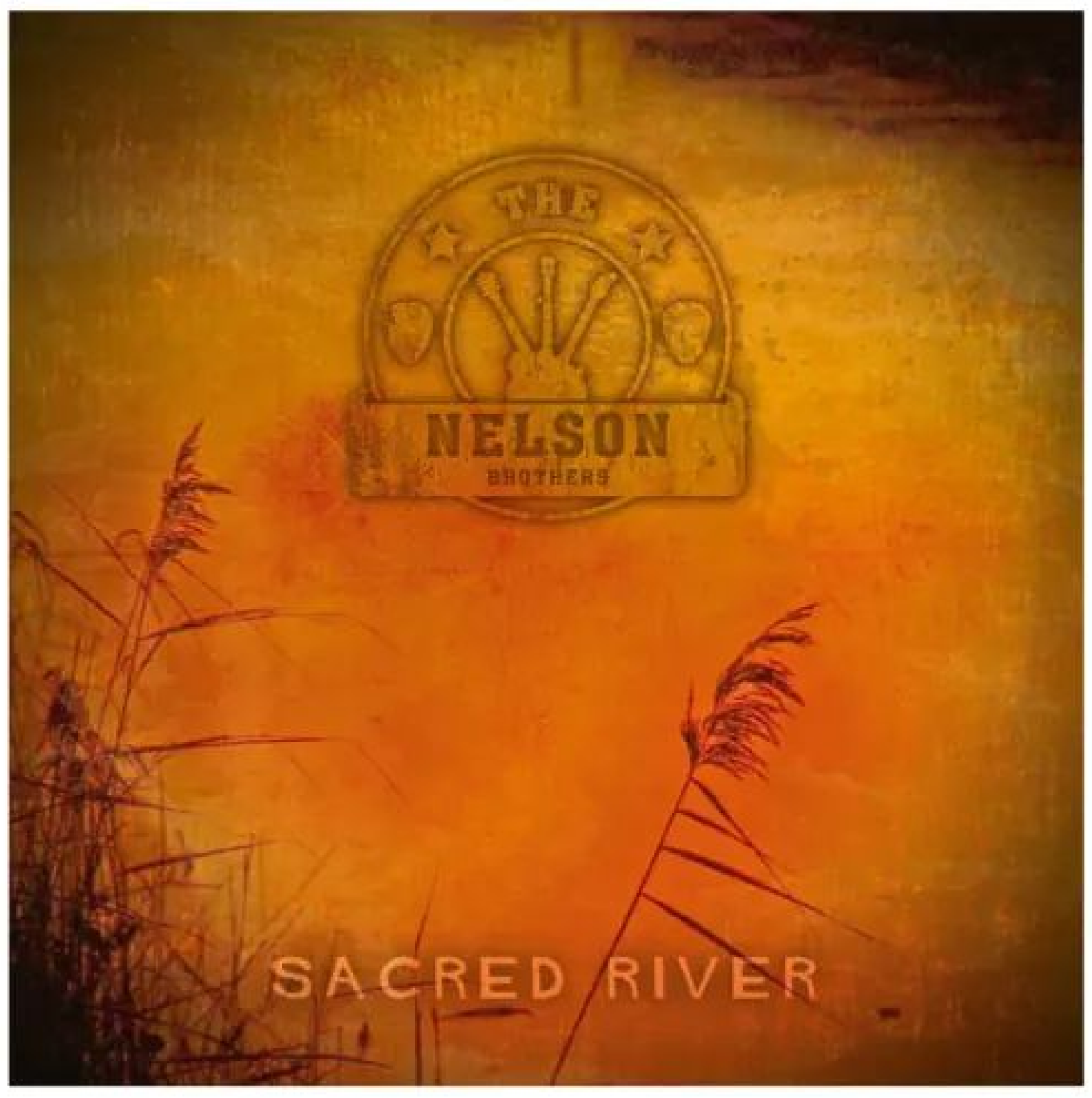
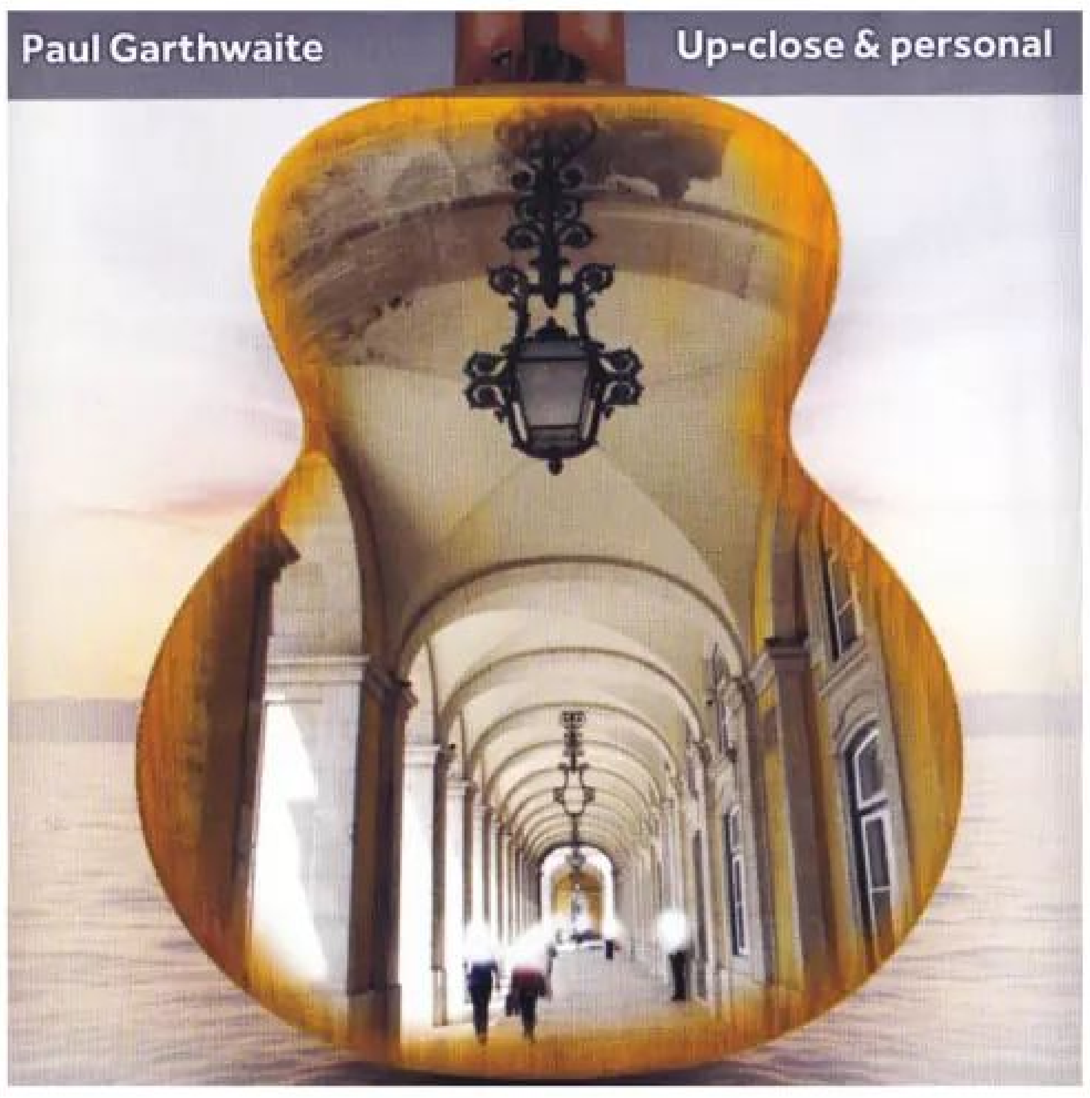


THE NELSON BROTHERS
SACRED RIVER

WWW.NELSONBROTHERS.CO.UK

For a couple of Staffordshire boys, the Nelson Brothers manage to pull off a convincing transatlantic vibe on their third album. And given the time they've spent working in Nashville, perhaps this shouldn't be surprising. For the most part, the band's music is steeped in 'alt country' – there's the clattering banjo on 'Cuckoo', a song not to be confused with the hoary traditional favourite, and the rampant cinematic imagery of 'Down In Biloxi'. With its consumptive wheezing accordion and jogging beat, 'Angelina' takes an unexpected eastern European twist, but for the most part there's nothing here that's going to reinvent any wheel. Then again with music this good, maybe it doesn't matter. **JP**



PAUL GARTHWAITE
UP-CLOSE AND PERSONAL

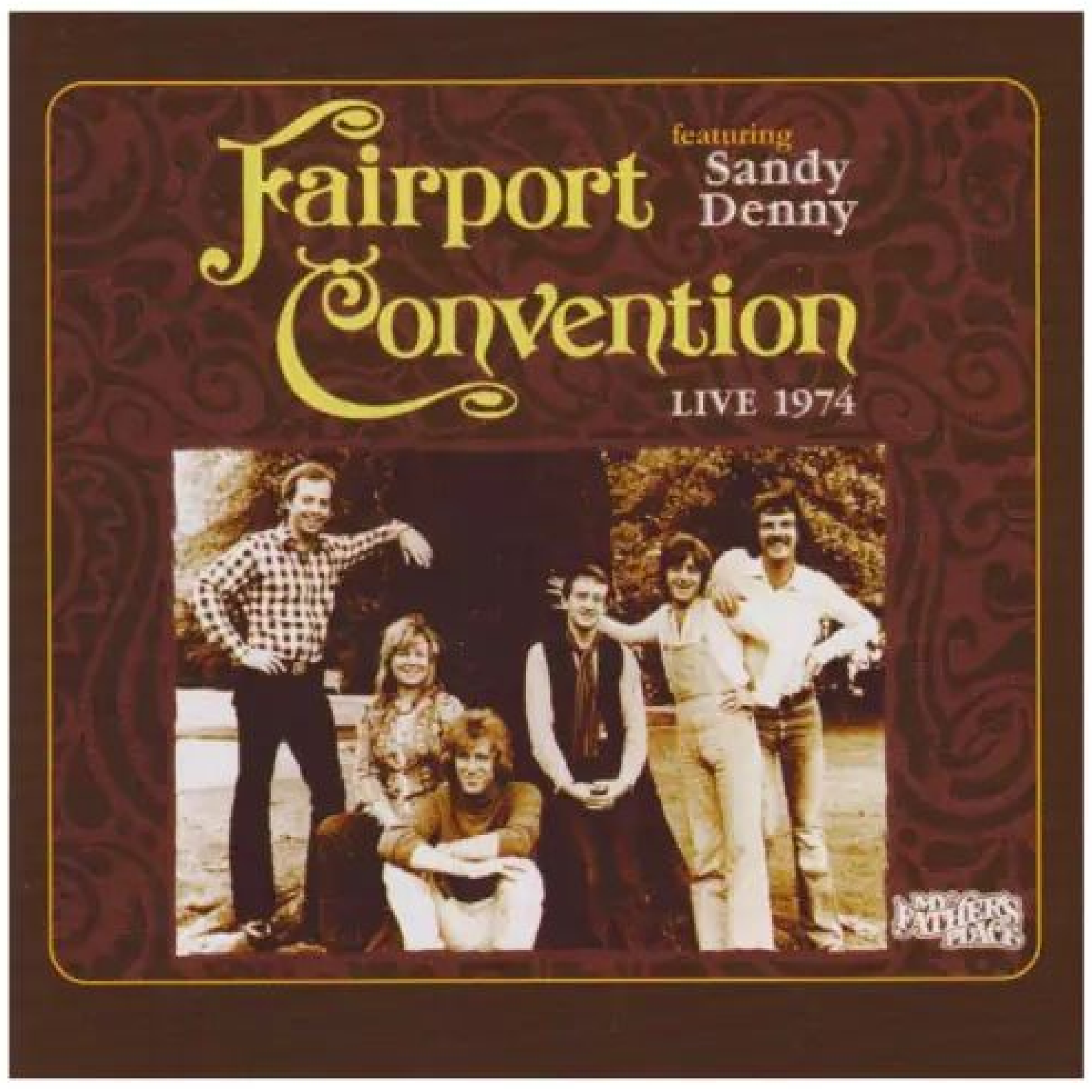
WWW.PAULGARTHWAITEMUSIC.COM

Being in a field of one has to be an enviable position, and as the owner of the world's only 22-string classical guitar, Paul Garthwaite is that man. It's no great surprise that Paul's opening track 'Ocean' is a classically-inspired instrumental, and one that displays the stunning tonal variation offered by his instrument. But Paul's far from being a one trick pony, and to prove the point, he dishes up the jazz-inflected 'Even The Judge Was Crying', the Bossa Nova influenced 'They Say It With Silence', and self-penned songs like 'The Apocalypse Has Been Cancelled', suggesting he's a man that doesn't take himself too seriously. **JP**

THE HONEYCUTTERS
ON THE ROPES

WWW.HONEYCUTTERS.COM

When a band hails from the country touchstone of Asheville, North Carolina, they usually tend to be a cut above the average, and so it is with the Honeycutters. Vocalist Amanda Anne Platt has one of those gorgeous, heartache drenched voices, bringing to mind Loretta Lynn, Sheryl Crow, and lonely country miles. Things ramp up with the rocky 'Back Row', the band playing with the kind of soulful restraint that only seems to grow south of the Mason-Dixon line. Maybe it would be good to hear them scuff up the rugs a little, but some great songs from a great band. **JP**



FAIRPORT CONVENTION
LIVE 1974 AT MY FATHER'S PLACE

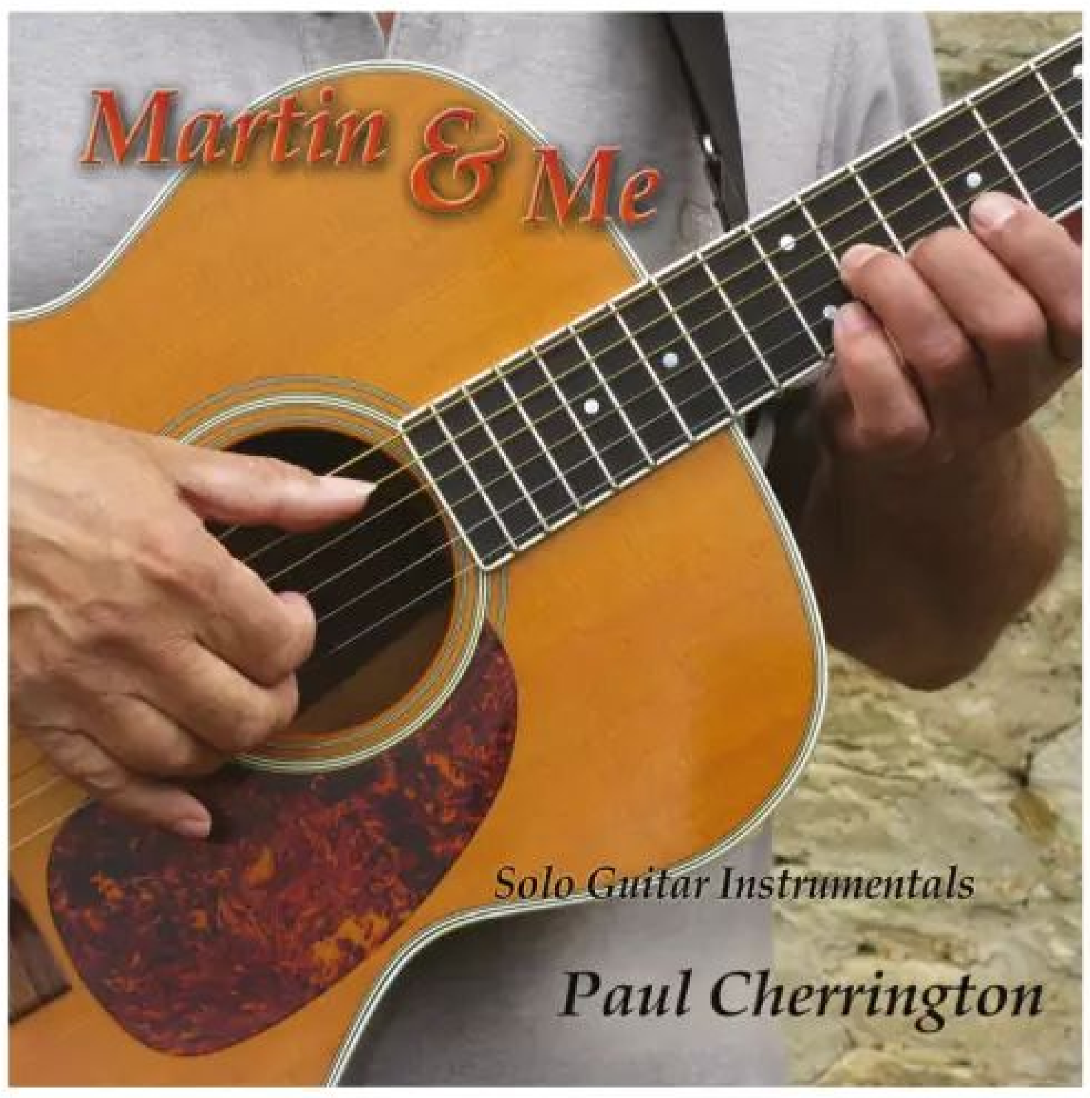
WWW.FAIRPORTCONVENTION.COM

Recorded in upstate New York and featuring the peerless vocals of Sandy Denny, the band work through a storming set that includes old favourites 'Matty Groves' and 'The Hexhamshire Lass', alongside Dylan's 'Down In The Flood' and 'Like An Old Fashioned Waltz', the title track of Denny's 1974 solo album. The interplay between Dave Swarbrick and Jerry Donahue is stunning, and egged on by the crowd, the band really cook. Had anyone asked the members of Fairport Convention that night whether the band would still be gigging four decades on, it's unlikely they would have said 'yes'. As it is, this stands as a priceless time capsule of a band at the top of their game. **JP**

THE STRAY BIRDS
MAGIC FIRE

WWW.THESTRAYBIRDS.COM

Produced by Larry Campbell, a man who's worked with Bob Dylan and Paul Simon, the fifth album from Pennsylvania's Stray Birds finds the trio moving towards the kind of soft guitar rock territory inhabited by Tom Petty. Not that that's a bad thing. Quite apart from the Stray Birds playing on guitar, fiddle and double bass, it's songs like the oh-so-radio-friendly 'Sabrina', that will blast their music to a wider audience. And every song's a gem, highlights being the gospel-inflected 'Shining In The Distance', the shuffling 'Sunday Morning', and atmospheric chunk of languid country honk that is 'Mississippi Pearl'. Watch this space. **JP**



PAUL CHERRINGTON
MARTIN & ME

WWW.CHERRINGTONANDWARD.CO.UK

If you're a sucker for the sound of a Martin guitar, then you should check this out. Over 14 disparate instrumentals, ranging from Rev'd Gary Davis's finger-twisting 'Cincinnati Flow Rag', to a particularly sensitive rendition of 'In The Bleak Midwinter', Paul works out on the Martin M36 that has been his loyal companion for 25 years. Moving through a variety of tunings, all helpfully revealed on the CD liner notes, a highlight has to be his DADGAD blues 'Night Train Blues'. Martin Carthy probably doesn't need to lose any sleep, but Paul's a fine player, and the clarity and analogue quality of the recorded acoustic sound, takes some beating. **JP**

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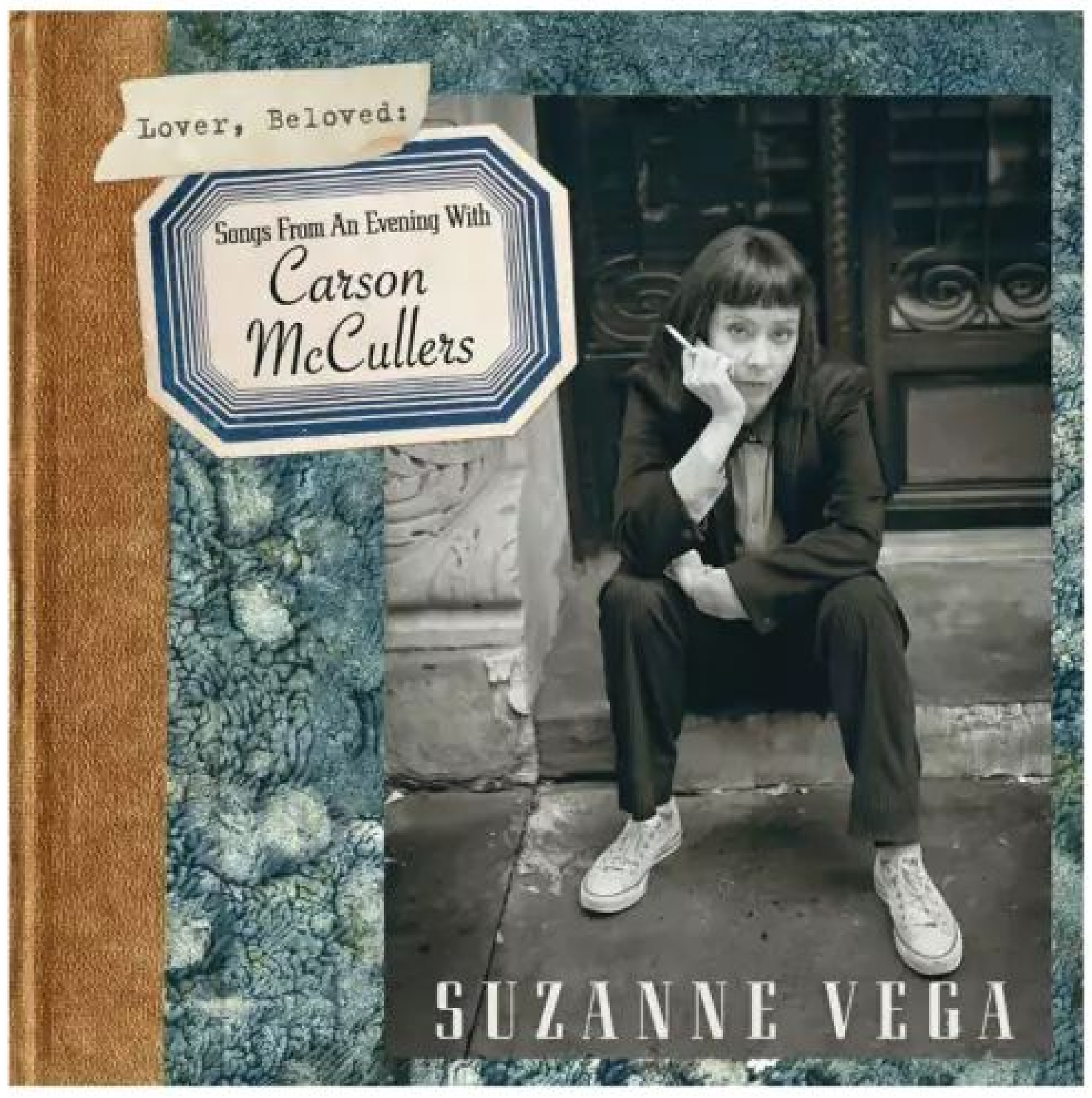


SUZANNE VEGA

LOVER BELOVED

WWW.SUZANNEVEGA.COM

As a teenager Suzanne Vega became a fan of writer Carson McCullers, and decided that "if I ever want to play a character at any point in the future, I could play this woman." Well, that hasn't come about, but the next best thing must have been recording this album of 10 songs, all inspired by the stage play of McCullers' life. Featuring Gerry Leonard's guitar playing over a backdrop of piano, bass and drums, it's a varied set of songs that moves from the jazz blues of 'Carson's Blues', to the poppy sounding 'We Of Me' and Dixieland stomp of 'Harper Lee'. If you're a fan of Ms Vega – or of course Ms McCullers – you'll be in hog heaven. **JP**

MICHAEL MCDERMOTT

WILLOW SPRINGS

WWW.MICHAEL-MCDERMOTT.COM

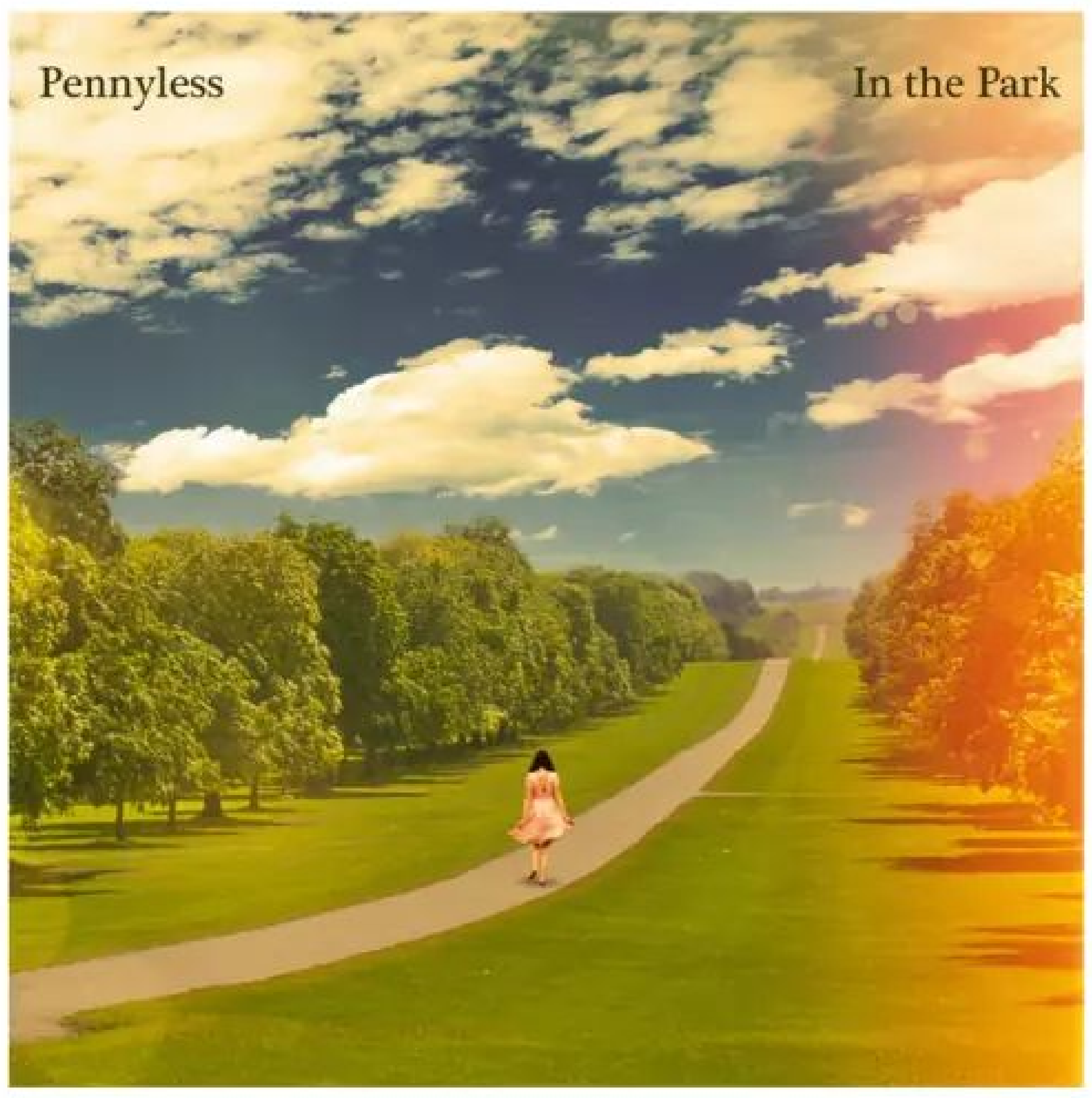
Often compared in the past to Springsteen or Dylan, the 10th album from prolific Chicago singer Michael McDermott finds him singing 'as much for the outcast as the congregation'. True, he does sound uncannily like Springsteen on songs like 'These Last Few Days' and 'Getaway Car', but there any similarity ends. McDermott inhabits a far murkier land than New Jersey, a land populated with junkie girls, pimps, pushers, bible thumpers and Jesus freaks. And if his horizon rarely brightens, even when he pokes fun at himself, admitting 'I don't want to be a folk singer any more', you know that this guy's a survivor. It may be thought provoking and hardly an easy ride, but the finest albums often aren't. **JP**

RYLEY WALKER

GOLDEN SINGS THAT HAVE BEEN SUNG

WWW.RYLEYWALKER.COM

Unless you've been living under a bush, the odds are that you'll already be familiar with the name of Ryley Walker. Superficially his approach to music making recalls the late John Martyn: lyrics that appear to be a stream of consciousness, strewn over disjointed ethereal arrangements, giving the impression the whole thing is a wonderful jam. But Ryley's gang know how to hang back, so on songs like 'Roundabout', a homage to a favourite Chicago bar, Ryley's acoustic guitar floats in space above a subdued backdrop of distorted electric guitar and electric piano, all anchored by a throbbing double bass. Genuinely intriguing and a breath of fresh air in an often stultified arena, greatness probably does beckon. **JP**

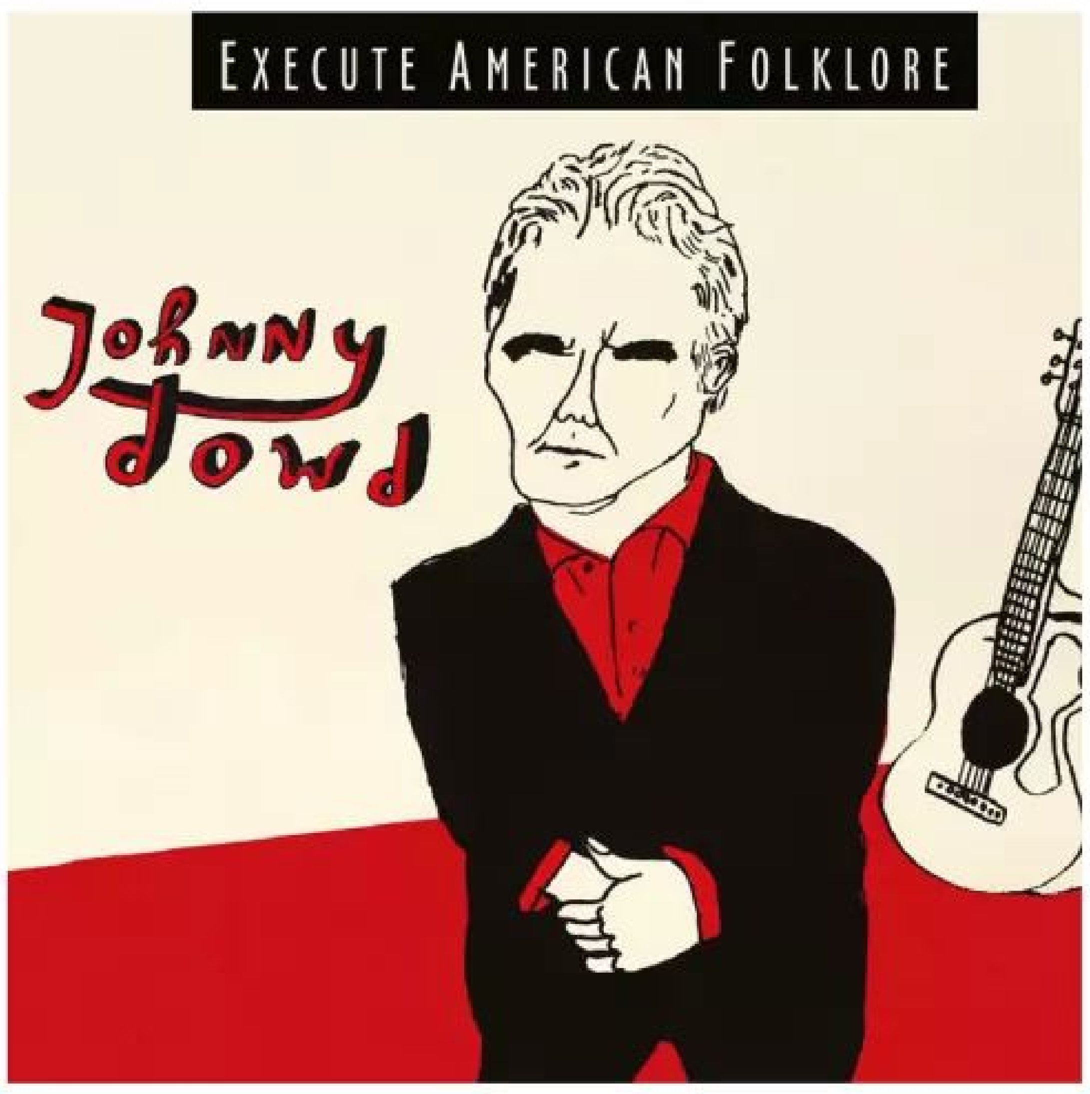


PENNYLESS

IN THE PARK

WWW.PENNYLESS-MUSIC.CO.UK

Pennyless are a South Lincolnshire band who admit their music is hard to categorise, but is 'played with love of acoustic music and good old England.' So we're off to a good start. The album kicks off with 'Merrie Dance', a spirited jig anchored by Penny Stevens' riotous violin. Birdsong introduces the cinematic title song, with Penny handling the vocals over soft acoustic guitar and violin, before the outfit strut their stuff on songs like 'The Gathering', an ode to the band's annual pilgrimage to Stonehenge for the solstice. There's no shortage of great playing here, and it clearly all comes from the heart. And there's a lot to be said for that. **JP**



JOHNNY DOWD

EXECUTE AMERICAN FOLKLORE

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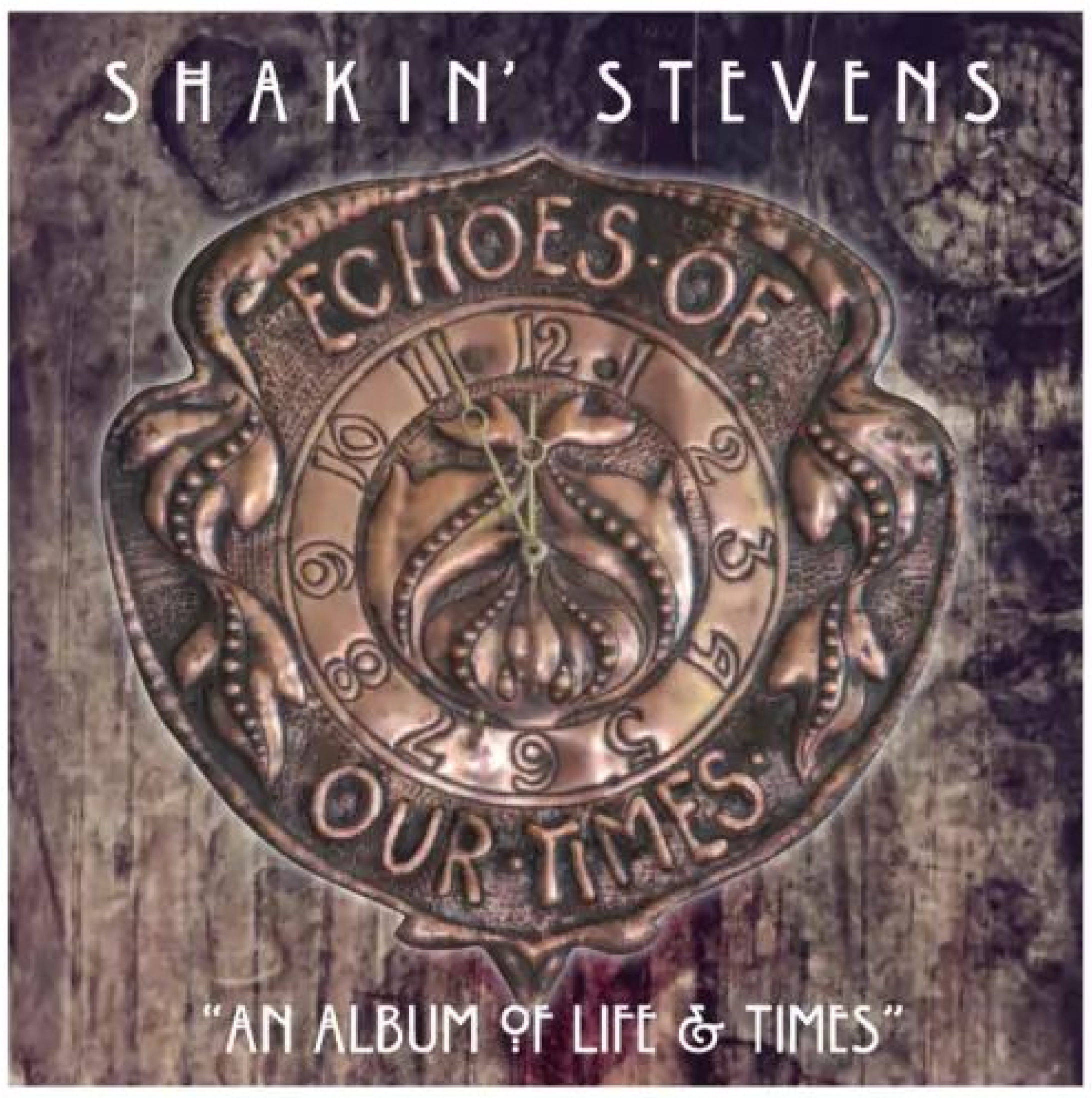
Some times music shouldn't be easy, and instead should be mysterious, idiosyncratic and the work of a true maverick. So we should wecome the arrival of a new Johnny Dowd album, which is like opening a case of gelignite. Whatever lurks inside, you know it ain't going to be an easy ride, and this is no exception. 'Whiskey Ate My Brain' comes on like some crazed ZZ Top out-take, before Mr Dowd goes on to rail about his 'Modern Woman', and the demented title track does just what it suggests. Never a man to run from the truth, if there was any justice this guy would be a legend. **JP**



SHAKIN' STEVENS

AN ALBUM OF LIFE AND TIMES

WWW.SHAKINGSTEVENS.COM

Shaky a banjo player – who would have known it? An album that will surprise fans used to seeing Mr Stevens gyrating onstage to 'Green Door', this set of songs explores his Cornish ancestry and is an unexpected twist in his long career. And it works. Shaky is no stranger to coming up with a good song, and 'Down In The Hole', featuring harmonica, Dobro and harmonium, is a stirring tribute to copper mining, while 'Echoes Of Our Times' is a banjo-led folk rock stomp. The whole thing chooglies along nicely and the backing – particularly the playing of Dobro man Julian Greaves – is spot on. Shaking up the changes for sure. **JP**

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Variation (anonymous)
Pachelbel's Canon (Johann Pachelbel)
Amis Rondo (Daniel Ho)
Solo Guitar:
Granada (Isaac Albéniz, arr. Celedonio Romero)
Homage to the Brazilian Indians (Heitor Villa-Lobos)
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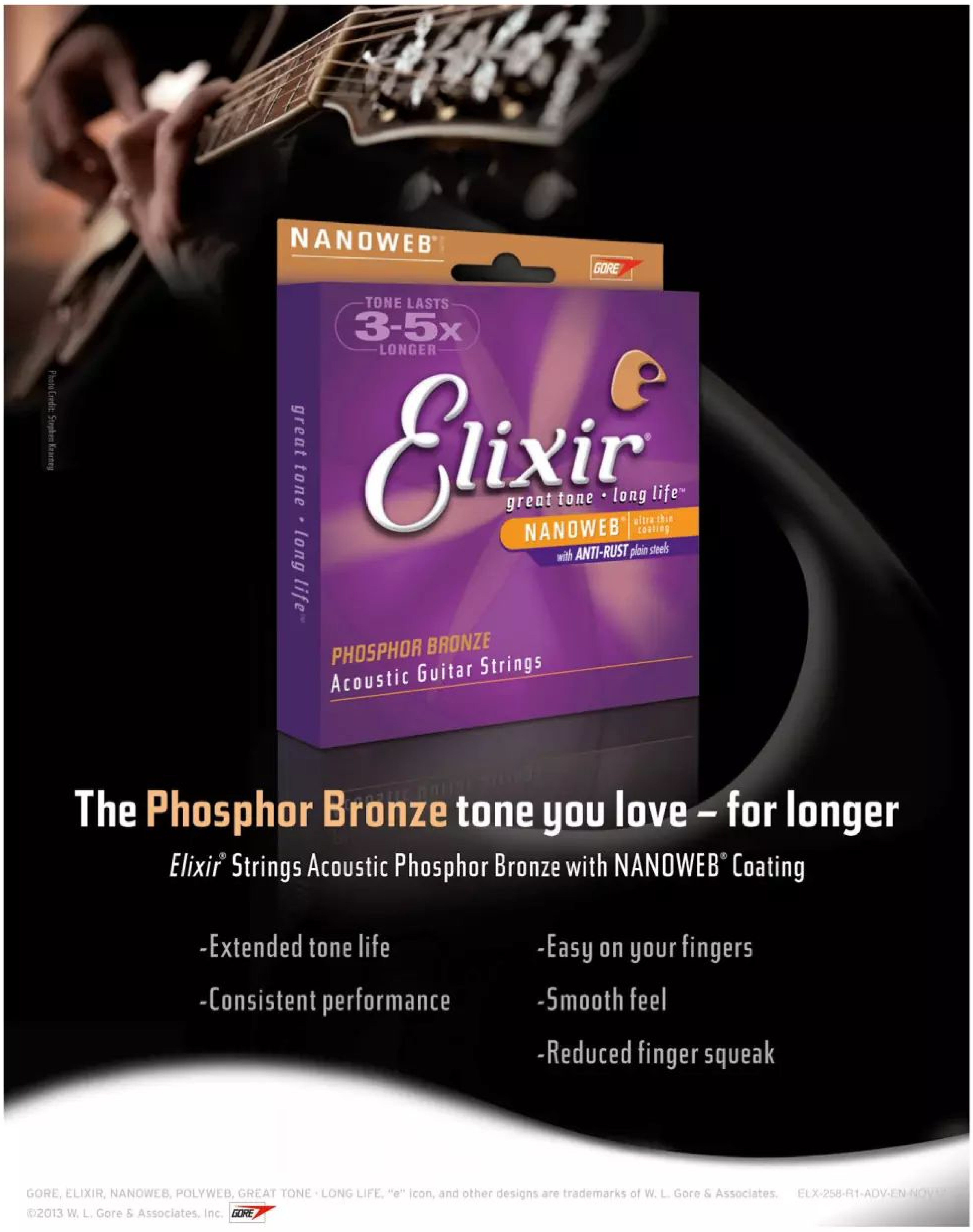

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GORDON GILTRAP INSTRUMENTAL ARTIST

FULL TAB ONLINE

'LONDON'

Gordon delves into his archive to provide performance notes for 'London'

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

This year marks the 40th anniversary of *Visionary*, the William Blake inspired album that marked a turning point in my career. The track 'London' is a personal favourite from the album, and it's a good one to share with you.

The piece should present no major problems, and anyone who has tackled any of my previous pieces in these columns will find it fairly straightforward.

The only sections to focus on are the first 12 bars, where much of it is played high up the neck around the 12th fret – and we all know it can become a little cramped up there!

The piece was inspired by William Blake's poem, which was pretty dark to say the least, and therefore I did my compositional best to echo and reflect this dark mood, especially in the section commencing at bar 21 where the dark clouds descend and the mood starts to become pretty profound.

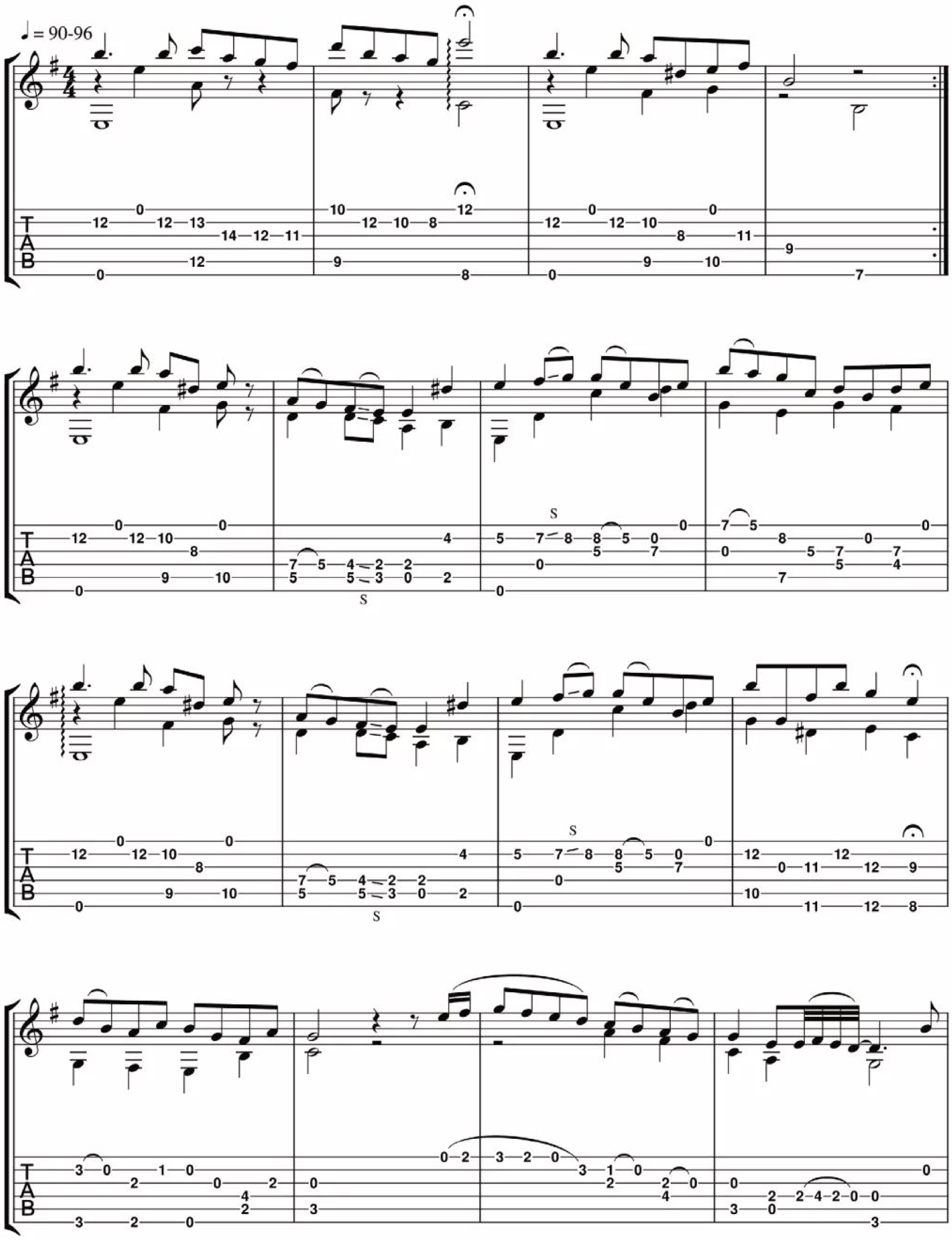
Your job is to try and create a reflective mood throughout the piece and take it at a steady pace. Don't be afraid to feel it the way you personally feel it should be.

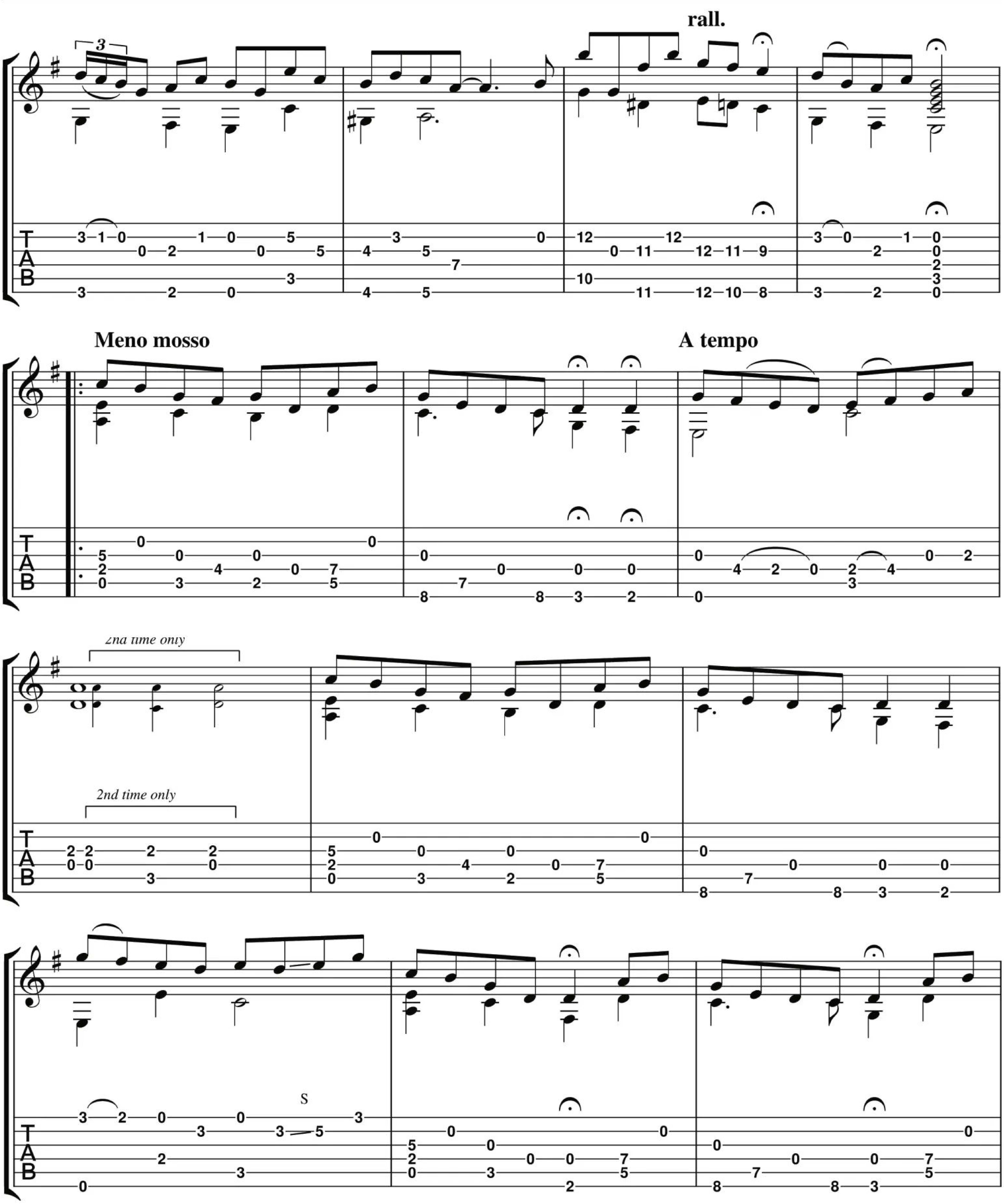
My good friend and fellow columnist Raymond Burley recorded a beautiful version of this piece – interpreted in a way only a fine player like Ray can – on his superb *The Long Road Home* CD. You can hear my version and Ray's on iTunes.

This piece, along with many of my compositions, can be downloaded from www.lathkillmusic.co.uk.

My thanks go to Steve Marsh for the transcription. ■

'LONDON' – GORDON GILTRAP





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CHRIS GIBBONS COMPOSER

INTRO TO INTERVALS

FULL TAB ONLINE

Chris continues his series on country guitar with an introduction to intervals

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

In the previous articles in this series we've started to understand the relationship between scales and chords. Now we'll also see how certain passages of music can be enhanced by using 'flipped over' voicings of the chords called 'inversions' to add more weight to the bass melody under the chord changes, and how to use suspended tones and pedal notes to build tension and create atmosphere from fairly simple structures.

In this month's issue we'll take a look at combining simple note intervals to melodic lines and start to explore how we can use these devices to build an interesting guitar part, in this case a 12-bar country blues progression in the key of E following the format:

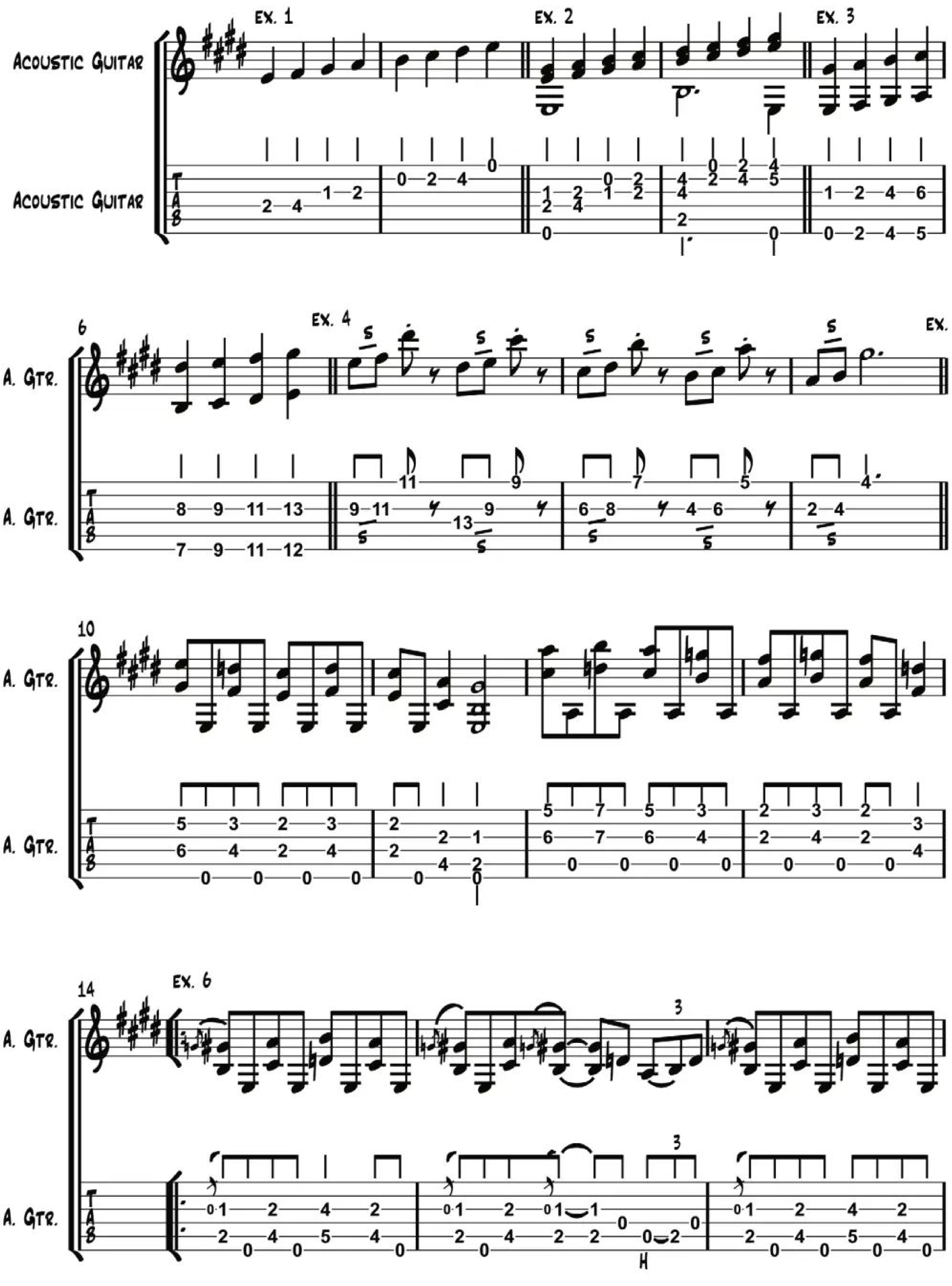
E /// | E /// | E /// | E /// | A /// | A /// | E /// | E /// | B /// | A /// | E /// | E / B / |

To familiarise you with common fingerings, I've notated the scale of E major in the open position in **example 1**. Play an E chord and then the notes of the scale, one by one to establish the tonality in your mind.

Now in **example 2**, we are adding another scale note to each step we take. To the first note E, we add the third note of the scale above it (G#) and play them simultaneously. As the notes are three steps apart, the resulting interval is a called third.

The next note of the scale is F# to which we add the third, A, and so on up the scale. Once you have grasped the fingering, you can add the bass notes which underpin the scale, E to B then back to E.

In **example 3**, we have lowered the pitch of the E to low E on the open string. The G# is now 10 scale steps away from the low E and therefore logically this interval is a tenth; essentially the same notes as before but the added distance



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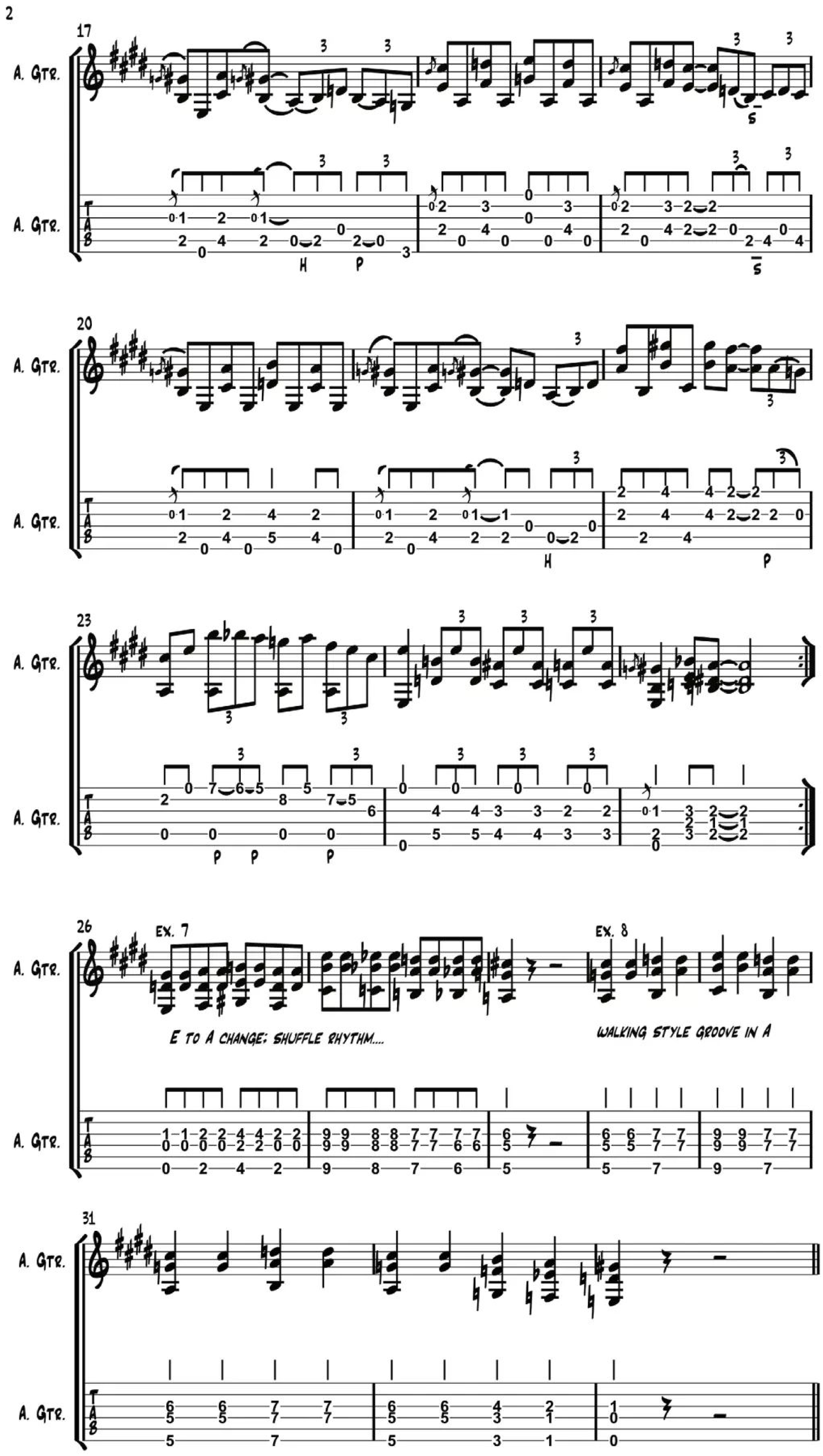

between the notes at each step is more 'robust'. In this example I have re-fingered the scale to move up the fretboard on just two strings, the low E and the G, as it gives you a good picture of the line as you move up the neck to connect chords in the same way as you would play, say, a G to C run in previous studies.

If you flip the interval of a third, so instead of G# above E, you place E above G#, you create an interval of six scale steps, and therefore the result is an interval of a sixth.

Like the third and the tenth, the sixth is a 'sweet' sounding interval, but more 'open', and commonly found in country and Memphis-style blues and soul music.

Example 4 is a Steve Cropper/ Cornell Dupree-style guitar lick but reminiscent of Floyd Cramer's country piano style.

In **example 5** we use a combination of the sixth with an E pedal tone, played in a shuffle type rhythm, and the same over an A pedal at bar 12.

Example 6 is an illustration of how these ideas can be used to create an attractive 12 bar country blues pattern, using a combination of the interval of a sixth, with pedal tones, pull-offs, slides and hammer-ons. You will see that there is a fill at the end of each two bar phrase for the first eight bars; try and substitute your own fills in this space and try to vary the basic pattern. Remember these are just building blocks, so don't be limited by them – learn them and then move on to your own ideas.

In **example 7** we use movement up the neck to create an interesting change from an E to A chord; try and move this idea around to different keys, become familiar with the sounds you are exploring and incorporate them into you own music.

Example 8 shows you how to use these new chord forms in a walking bass style: strum this above the end of the fret board, dampening between the chord strums by releasing pressure with the left hand to get a good 'pumping' sound.

Finally with **example 9**, you use a 'dead thumb' country bass on the open A string, using the palm of the right hand while letting the notes in the treble ring out.

Rehearse all of these moves slowly at first and then gradually work up the tempo. You will then see how easy it becomes to 'mix and match' the sounds and colours of these intervals in an attractive way. As with all studies, use these examples and skills as raw material for your own creativity. ■

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EXS 5-6 ONLINE

NO MORE BEEF STEW

Carl Orr of Rockschool challenges us to take our solos to a new level

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

Every time I come to pen one of these columns I find myself with my head in my hands at my desk wondering what to write about. This one was to be no exception.

After quietly whimpering for half an hour I decided to distract myself by cooking dinner for my family. I went down to the kitchen and commenced making a curry. As I got everything I needed ready, I was reminded of a phrase coined by Mick Goodrick in his book, *The Advancing Guitarist*.

He refers to the 'stuff' we always play in our solos – the same old phrases over and over – as "beef stew". I remember wondering what he meant by this. And then I realised. When you make a beef stew you throw in whatever's available; some cheap beef, onions, celery, garlic, tinned tomatoes and 'stuff' that's approaching expiration that needs to be used up: a red pepper, a couple of potatoes, a handful of mushrooms.

Very tasty if you season it properly and cook it well. However, if that's the only dish you know how to cook with a few variations (add a couple of carrots, a can of red kidney beans, maybe throw in a bay leaf and a glass of red wine), it's going to taste more or less the same each time. This, unfortunately, is an excellent description of how many people sound when they improvise. So how do you get around this?

I was greatly inspired by Mick Goodrick's book, especially his clear and simple rut-busting improvisation exercises, and it enabled me to come up with a few of my own that may help you elevate your solos to the next level. The simplest one is thematic improvisation.

Start with a simple rhythm as in **example 1**. Imagine it over a simple 'bumpa-bumpa' blues shuffle. As indicated, the rhythm is swung, giving us that triplet feeling so common in blues, jazz and rhythm and blues.

Now, in **example 2**, I've added some pitches to it. Record yourself playing a simple 'bumpa bumpa' blues rhythm on a G chord at 110BPM; you can either use a loop pedal or recording software to loop it or just record yourself on your phone for a couple of minutes.

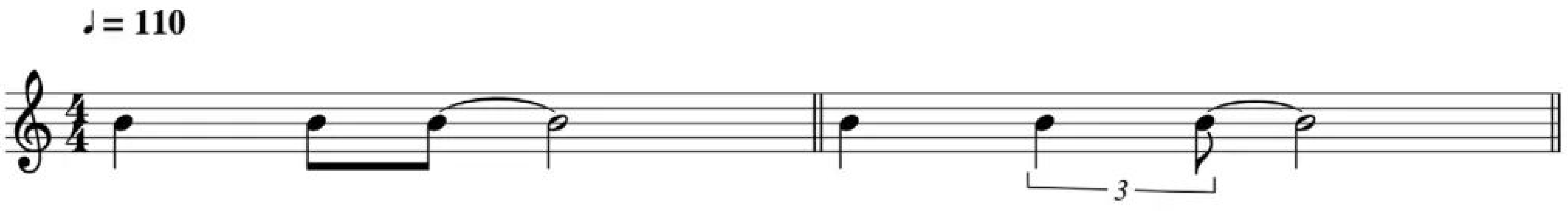
Play each phrase four times. Then, once you've done that, repeat the example with your own choice of pitches. but still using the same rhythm.

Next, record yourself playing a 12 bar blues in G. Then do the following exercise:

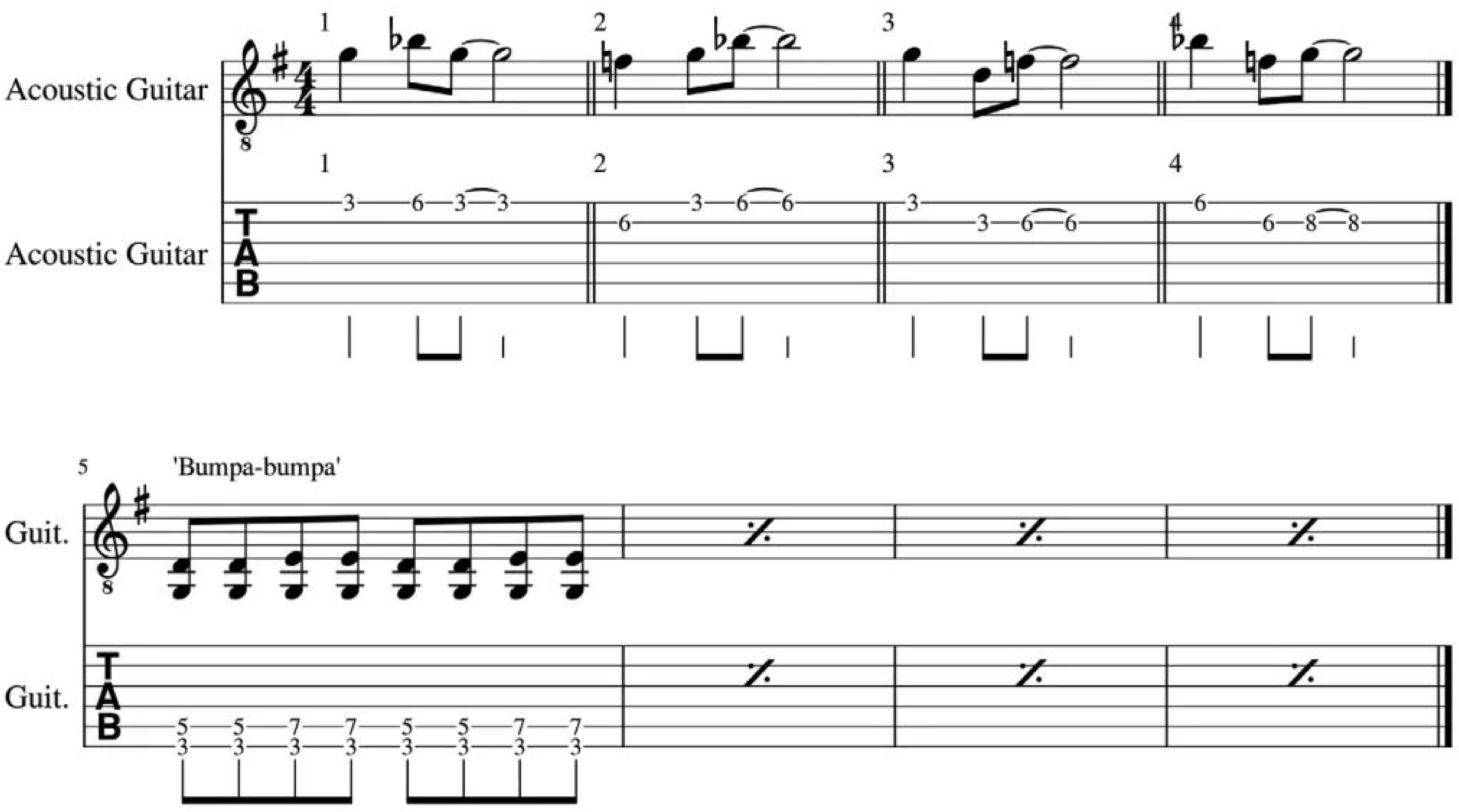
1. Play the original phrase (in this case I have chosen the first phrase)
2. Repeat the original phrase
3. Slight variation
4. Original phrase
5. Another variation
6. Different phrase to finish off

I've shown this process in **example 3**, and you will notice that the resulting 'solo' has real coherence to it, as each phrase logically

EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



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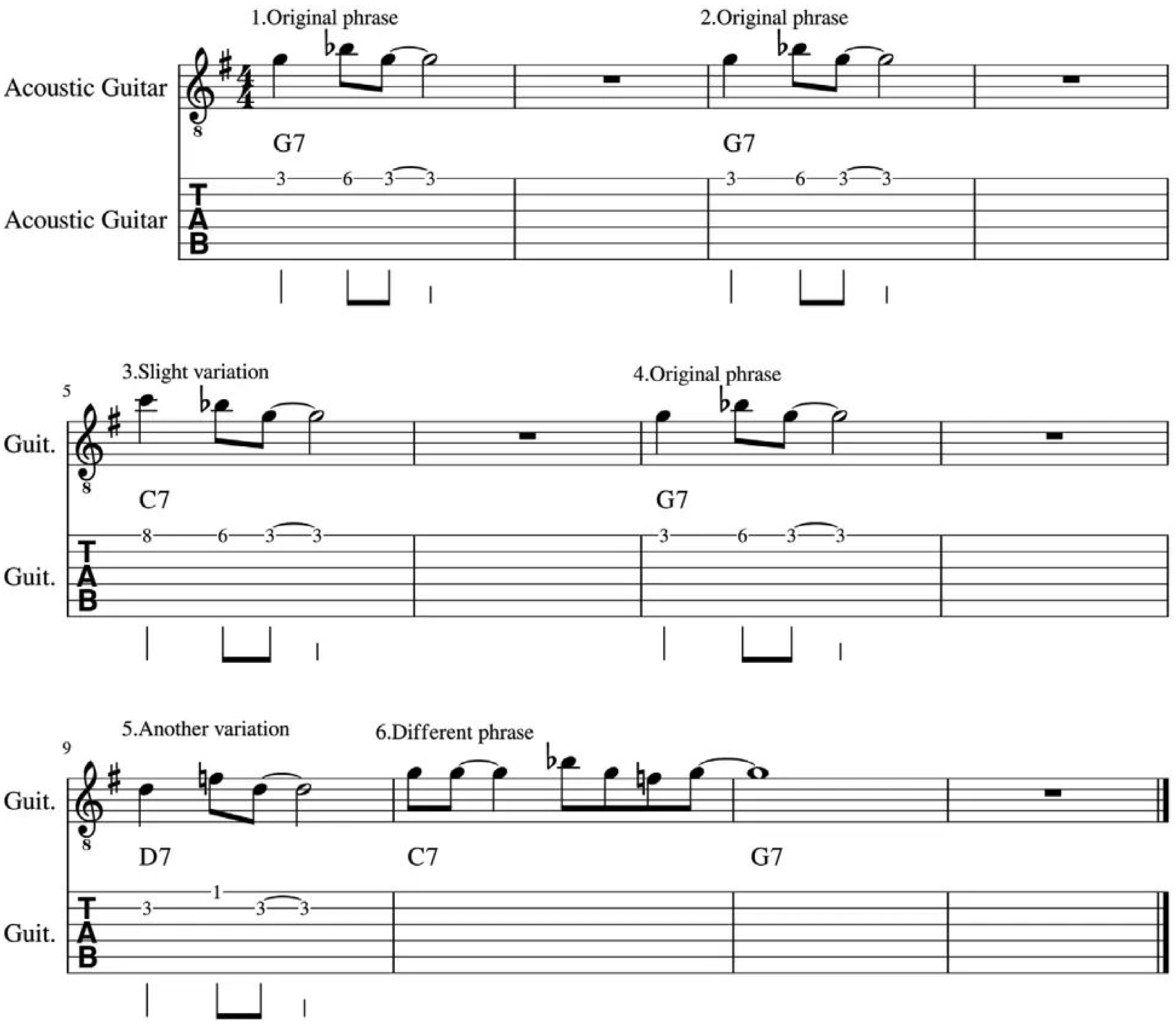
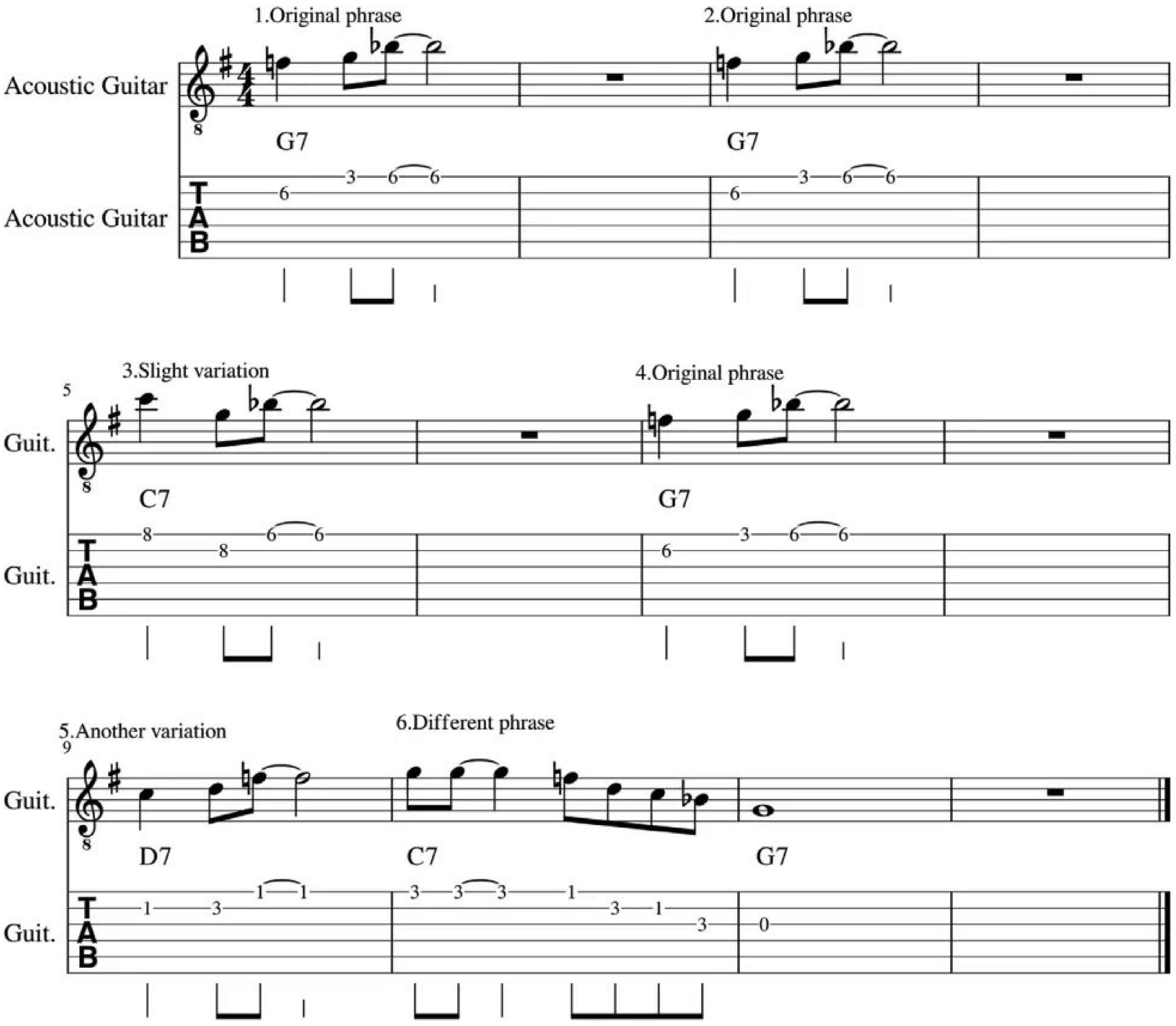
EXAMPLE 3



EXAMPLE 4



"After you have played through these examples, just try playing freely as you please and I am sure you will notice an immediate difference in the kind of ideas you come up with"

follows on from the previous phrase. You will also notice that there is a lot of space in there, so that both the player and the listener have time to absorb each phrase before the next one is played.

It's also very easy to do; a single idea can be used for a whole chorus of the blues, so the pressure to come up with new and exciting ideas is greatly reduced, but in a way which is very musically effective.

Examples 4-6 use the same approach, but starting with the second, third and fourth phrase, respectively.

After you have played through these examples and maybe had a go at making up a few of your own, just try playing freely as you please and I am sure you will notice an immediate difference in the kind of ideas you start to come up with. So get to work and develop some different 'recipes' – leave the beef stew alone for a while!

I will continue my exploration of phrasing and improvisation over the next few columns. ■

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RICHARD GILEWITZ FINGERSTYLE GUITARIST

'WATERMARK'

FULL TAB ONLINE

Richard provides more lessons on arrangement while exploring the piece 'Watermark' by his teacher David Walbert

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

When asked for guidance about music arrangement, I often defer to the knowledge acquired from David Walbert, my own guitar instructor of nearly 40 years. His original and covered arrangements are exhilarating yet refined with subtle nuances and colorations that enhance the music to its fullest potential.

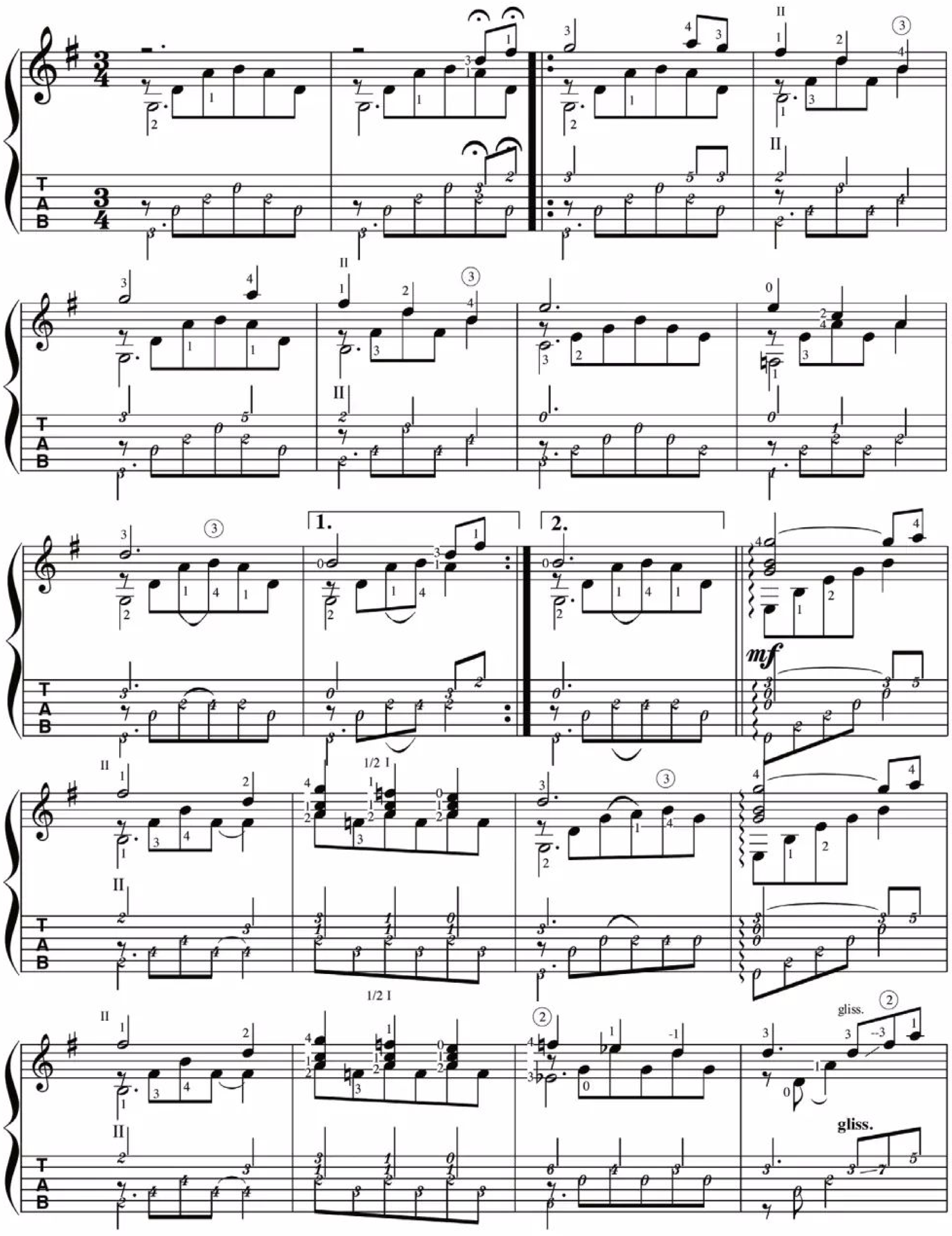
Some of what I have learned from David cannot be put down in words. However, with the risk of repeating suggestions from my previous articles, I offer some important suggestions and questions for thought that have enhanced my own approaches to the compositions of others and in my original arrangements. These basic fundamentals can lead the way to improving your playing, even if they are simple steps forward from the fear of not knowing anything at all.

Knowledge: study at least a minimum of music theory to unlock the mystery of how to map out a tune in order to understand it. What does it mean to play in a particular key? What is a key signature? What is the musical alphabet involving sharps and flats? How do you create a chord from a triad?

Rhythm: How many different rhythms are you able to play? Did you know that cultures are defined and identified by particular rhythms? How do time signatures work with rhythm? What is a jig? A reel? Waltz time? Common time?

Technique: This is the grease of the wheels, applied to avoid stumbling around with poor proficiency and severe limitations. Good technique applies to more than just treatment

'WATERMARK' – DAVID WALBERT



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of the notes. Check your own posture and breathing when both practising and performing or recording. Perfect your hand and finger angle attacks for smoother note flow and use the metronome during practice sessions.

Repertoire: A balance of some sort should occur during the accumulation of a solid repertoire. Often too many or too few tunes are taken on board to properly address, so that you may never truly expand a tune to a more solid potential. With too few, it's easy to get bored and lose inspiration. Truthfully I don't think a tune is ever done, but they can be worthy of sharing at some point. Over the years they will tend to modify in some sense as you change as a person and player.

Decoration: For me, this is truly the most fun. Much like painting or decorating the house you've built from dedication and hard work, this is when you get to add all the cool stuff that becomes your own signature. It is when nuances are created or simply appear on their own, such as vibrato, glissandos, staccatos and sustains, varied transfers from location to location and a general sense of personal expression in your own playing.

The included notation is a beautiful arrangement by David Walbert of 'Watermark', a composition of Irish singer-songwriter and producer, Enya. I will help navigate you through this arrangement with special attention given to particular areas that either might be overlooked or need to be considered or addressed.

Bar one: Sustain the bass note throughout the bar and avoid the temptation to treat the note with any effect such as a vibrato. Save this effort for later and don't use up that touch so early in the piece.

Bar two: Notice in the musical notation at the end of the bar that the fretting hand first finger is used as a barre. Finger one is suggested for the first and third string, which allows for the second and third fingers to fall into place for the third bar, the actual first section of the tune beyond the brief intro.

Note – and it's a big note – I see students continually ignore the suggested fingerings for both the left and right hands that are offered with an arrangement. It doesn't mean you have to take their suggestions, but at least look at them. It will make a difference.

Bar three: There's a trick involving the last beat here that'll allow you to maintain fluidity when dealing with the potentially difficult transfer. A quarter note is called for, but if I allow for the full quarter note I will have trouble getting to the next notes smoothly. What I do is consciously allow for about 80-90 per cent of the note value and create a blip of silence to buy some time to arrive on beat on the following bar or, in some cases, notes within a bar. This occurs again at the end of bar eight, 13 and a few others. Be sure to look for these opportunities.

Bar five: Notice that the last note is an open string. This is an ideal opportunity to lift your entire hand and prepare it to set down for the follow-up barre chord that is required in the upcoming segment.

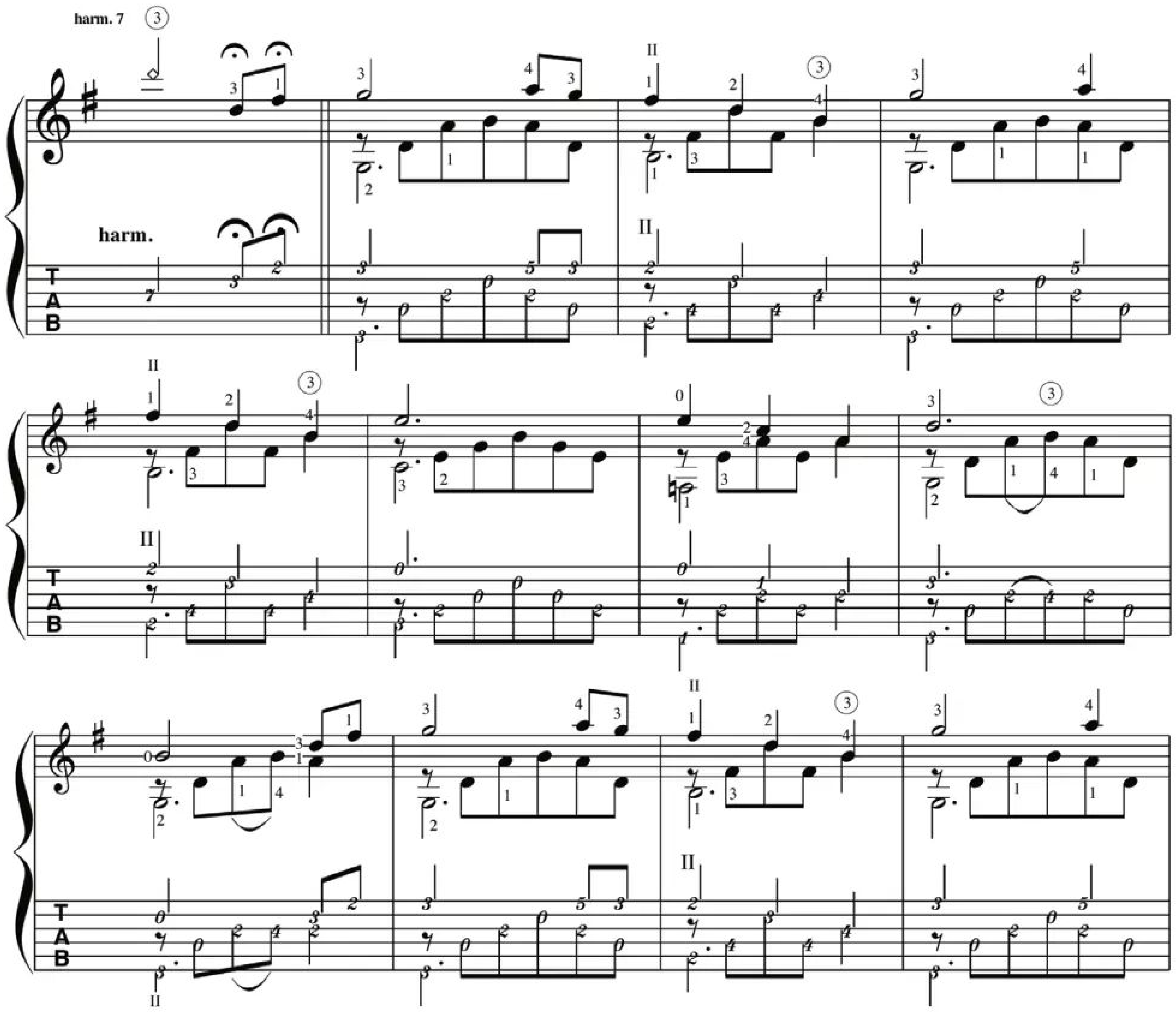
Bar nine: The two to four in tablature, or A to B in notation, indicates a hammer-on and needs to be created with the fretting hand due to the arched line between the notes. Be careful about doing the move too quickly as you will create a grace note that will throw off your timing.

Bar 12: The little squiggle mark to the left of the notes indicates to roll the fingers in a rapid sequence or arpeggiated fashion. The *mf* stands for *mezzo forte* and requires you to play these notes more pronounced or at a higher volume. Rewinding a bit here: at the top of bar two, the little dot with an arch over the top is a *fermata*, which suggests that the notes should be prolonged. This is precisely how, as a player, you can introduce what is often referred to as expression in your playing.

Bar 20: Now I'd like to bring attention to the glissando or slide between the notes with the third finger. Many times I observe players leave their finger on the string and slide, but fail to maintain pressure on the string, which negates the glissando or sliding effect. Whenever a slide is required, pay close attention to this.

Once a tip is given at the beginning of an arrangement, that particular point may not be repeated when the same notes or passage are repeated later in the piece. You must realise it is your job to remember.

Use a metronome in the development of this arrangement and only attempt to play a few bars at a time in a cyclical fashion to allow for a couple of metronome clicks between efforts to take the pressure off. Set the metronome to a tempo slower than is intended for performance speed. Memorise the tune so that you do not require the music as a crutch. Once you think you have it memorised go back repeatedly and check for accuracy. ■



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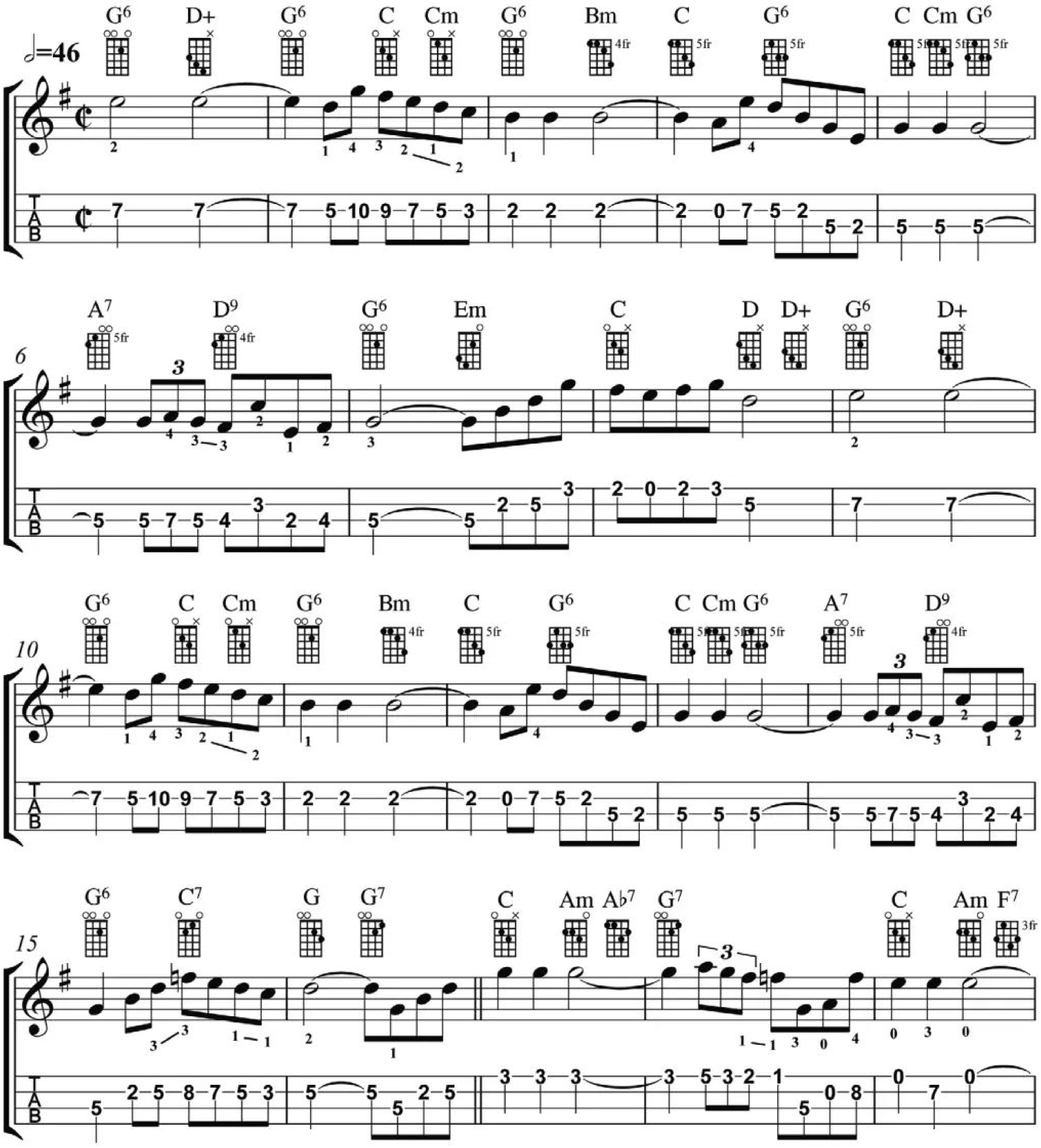
'SKYLARK'

Simon focuses on a Hoagy Carmichael tune from the Great American Songbook

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

'SKYLARK' – HOAGY CARMICHAEL



He's maybe not quite so much a household name as Irving Berlin or Cole Porter, but Hoagy Carmichael stands tall in the list of contributors to the *Great American Songbook*. His melodies can sound simple at first, but they invariably contain subtle harmonies and modulations that are woven so expertly into the fabric of the music that their effect, while significant, is subliminal. Many of his tunes are characterised by a laid back, almost lazy feel, and many are of sublime beauty – as with 'Skylark'. Incidentally, Johnny Mercer's lyrics to this song are equally beautiful; they're not printed here, but find them online if you fancy a sing.

There are a number of different ways we might finger this tune, none of them right or wrong, but if you follow a combination of the tablature and the fingering marks you'll get my preferred version.

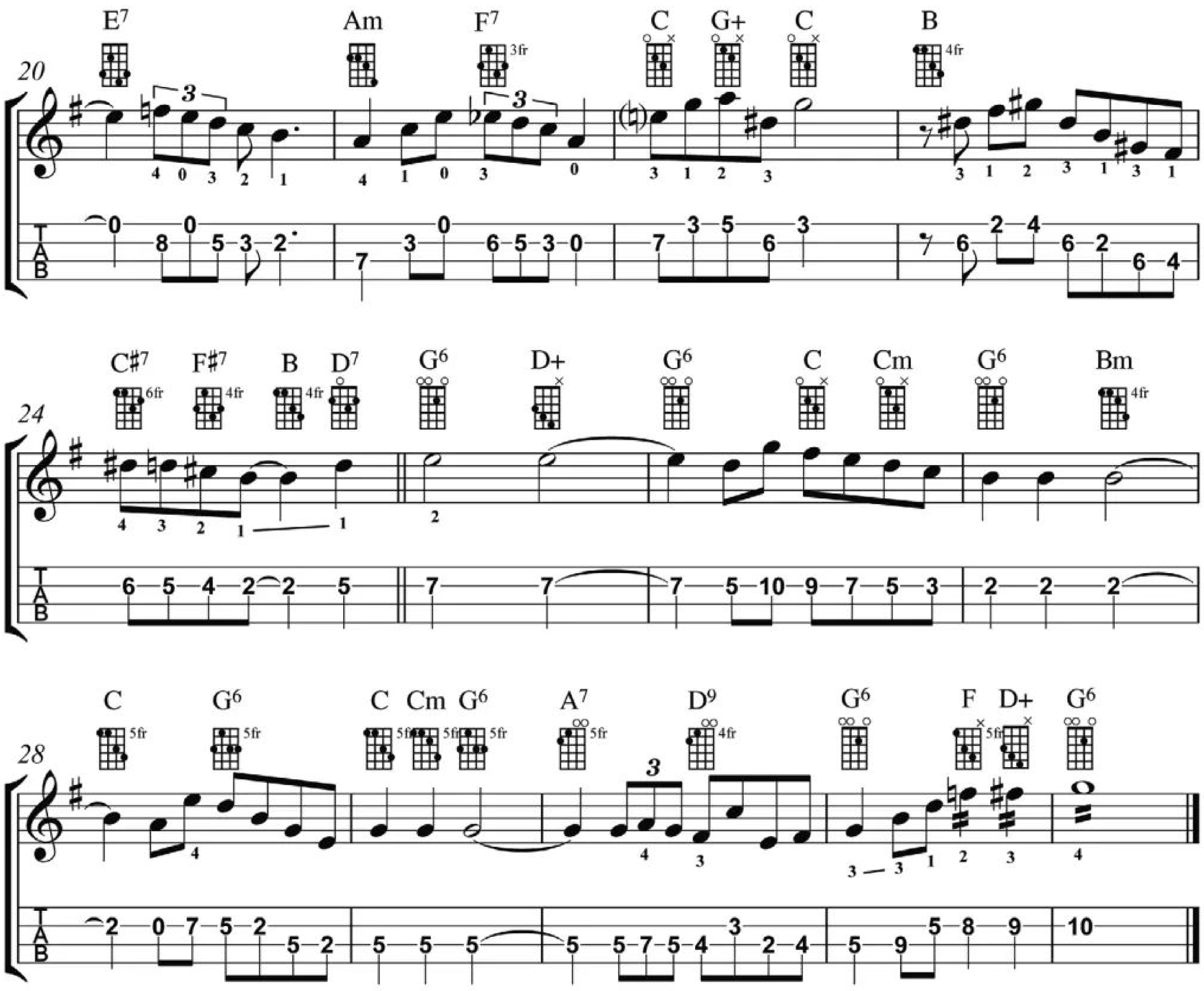
An obvious first question would be: why not use the open top string for the opening two notes of E? When violinists reach a certain level of competence they are encouraged to avoid playing open strings because it's harder to control the tone when the string is – quite literally – not under the finger. On a mandolin, the difference in tone between an open string and a fingered string is not quite so marked, but it is present, and particularly on a slow tune like this, it is wise to use fingered notes where possible. Try playing the open E string and then play the same note on the seventh fret of the second string and you should hear the tone become more solid, rounder and fatter. Glance through the tablature and you'll see I've only allowed myself the occasional open string, usually a passing note. Adopting this approach means we are going to be moving up and down the neck more than if we just played the whole thing down in first position. If you read this column regularly, you'll know that I often extol the virtues of executing a position shift while playing an open string because it's the least audible way to do it. But here we're concerned with avoiding open strings, so we just have to

"On a mandolin, the difference in tone between an open string and a fingered string is not quite so marked, but it is present, and particularly on a slow tune like this"

make the shift as swiftly and accurately as we can. In the second bar you'll see the second finger plays an E, followed by the first on a D, and then the whole hand shifts down to first position with the second finger on the C. While you're playing the D, think about aiming for the C with your second finger and make the shift as inaudible as possible. If this were a fast tune the manoeuvre would be difficult, but it's not too bad here, and the tone remains consistent.

Now have a look at the phrase in bar six crossing into bar seven. Short of growing an extra finger on the left hand, it is impossible to play this without making a shift of some sort, even though the whole phrase is in first position. Sliding the third finger down from the G to the F# is the most elegant solution, freeing the second finger for the C, and then we're back in standard first position fingering.

In the bridge passage (bars 17-24) I have used open strings a little more freely, partly for contrast and partly opportunistically because in this section the sustain an open string offers can be used to artistic advantage. Take bar 19 as an example: playing the note E alternately on the open top string and seventh fret of the second string creates an appealing effect. You could use similar sustain in bar 21 (although this is not specifically notated) by allowing the A played on the third string and the high E on the open top string to sustain throughout the bar. From bar 25 we're back to the original approach and I've allowed myself just three notes played tremolo to finish.



The mandolin is often underrated as a rhythm instrument, but it can work extremely well in this role. Obviously, we can only play chords with a maximum of four notes, and it would be easy to assume that the lush harmonies associated with this genre would be better provided by a guitar or piano. It's certainly a challenge, but not an insurmountable one. If we choose the inversions we use carefully, and where we are obliged to miss out certain notes of a chord through sheer lack of strings (ever tried a full G#m7sus4?), we choose those equally carefully. There is much we can imply in the harmonic structure. Indeed, it's often the case that we only need three or even two notes in a chord to get it to do its job. So on this occasion I've added chord diagrams as well as chord symbols to let you know exactly what I'm playing in the right channel when you listen to the MP3 on the *Acoustic* website; the melody, of course, is in the left channel.

You'll notice too, that, as so often with notated music, it is but a guide to a performance, and I've allowed myself leeway with both tempo and rhythm. You'll also hear grace notes, an occasional slide, and other decorative tricks. It's up to you to make the printed page come alive in your own way. ■

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MIKE DAWES FINGERSTYLE VIRTUOSO

‘OVERLOAD’

Part two of our look at Mike’s track ‘Overload’

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED

Hello again, as many of you will remember, we touched on the first few sections of my new single ‘Overload’ back in May as a method of demonstrating a rhythm-led compositional approach.

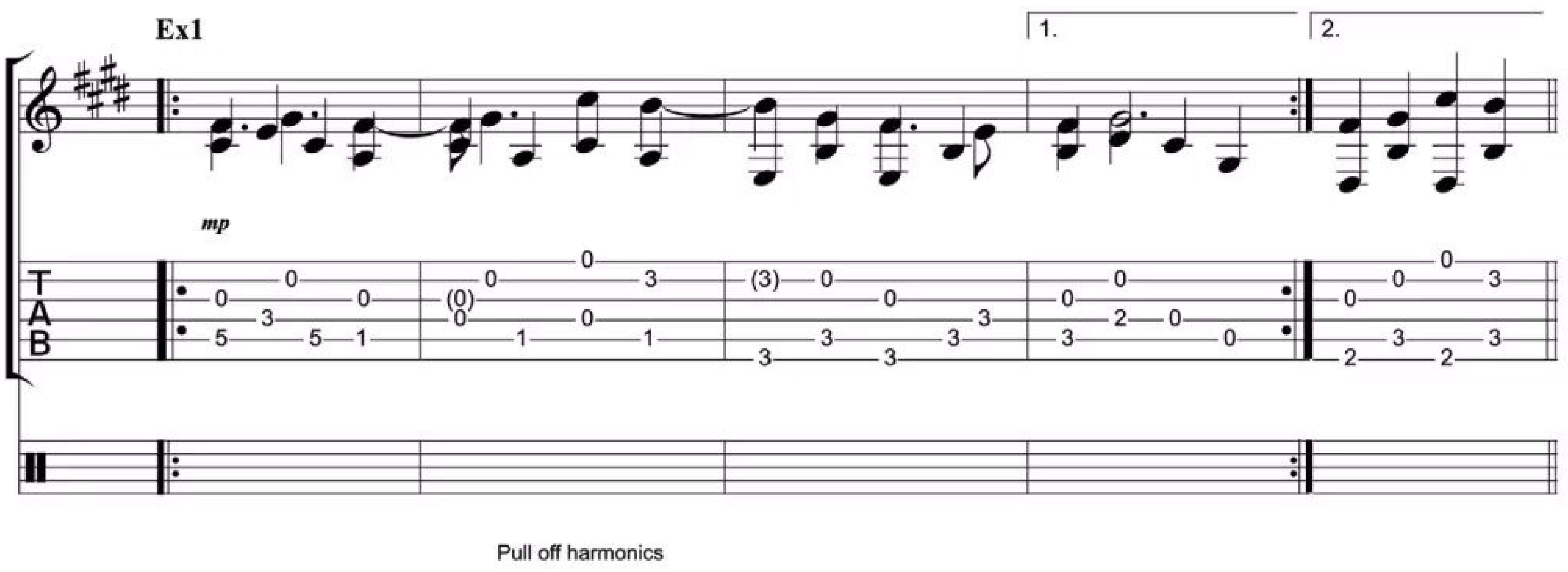
This tune stemmed from a jam session in a bathroom (with fantastic reverb) backstage at the Blue Note in New York a few years ago, and I feel it’s a great example of how you can build a catchy tune without necessarily starting with the topline.

The song is available to view on YouTube and to listen to on Bandcamp – just search ‘Mike Dawes’. It’s in C#G#C#F#G#C# tuning and we will continue today with the start of the first verse...

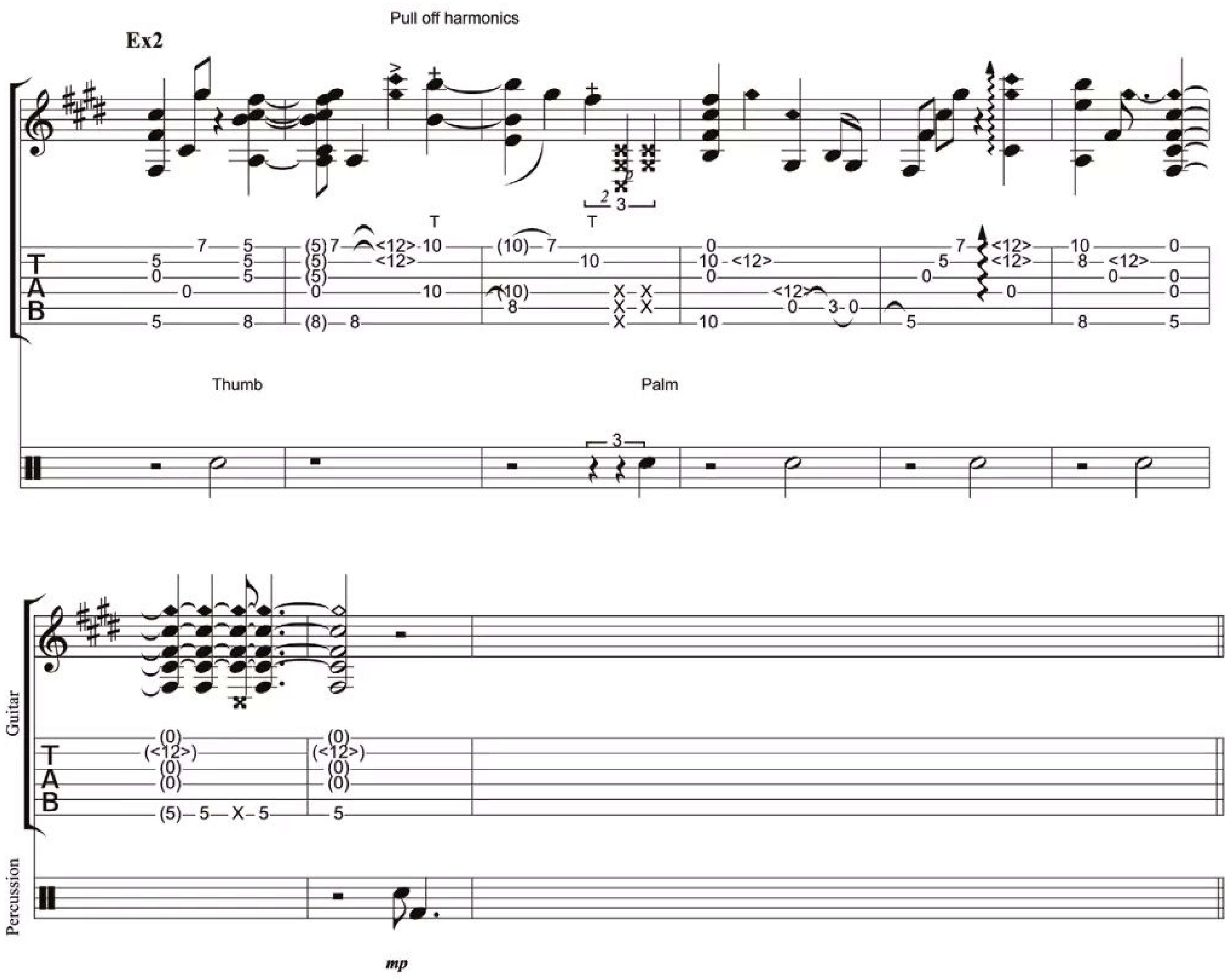
Example 1 lifts off from where we left last issue, with Travis picking. Here I’m picking a consistent Merle Travis-style onbeat bass-line around a four-chord progression and melody that borrows from a modern pop/rock style – a nice blend of old and new. I’m using as many open strings as possible for the melody to really fill space, a nice contrast when juxtaposed with the furious opening riff. Watch out for the alternate ending after the initial repeat.

The verse continues in **example 2** by continuing and adapting the existing melody but applying different modern guitar techniques to the bass, chords and treble. Here we have examples of ‘pull off harmonics’, the act of pulling off a note, or multiple notes with the fretting hand whilst simultaneously touching the harmonic point with the picking hand. We can also see examples of tapping, which in open tunings can introduce interesting harmonies when

EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



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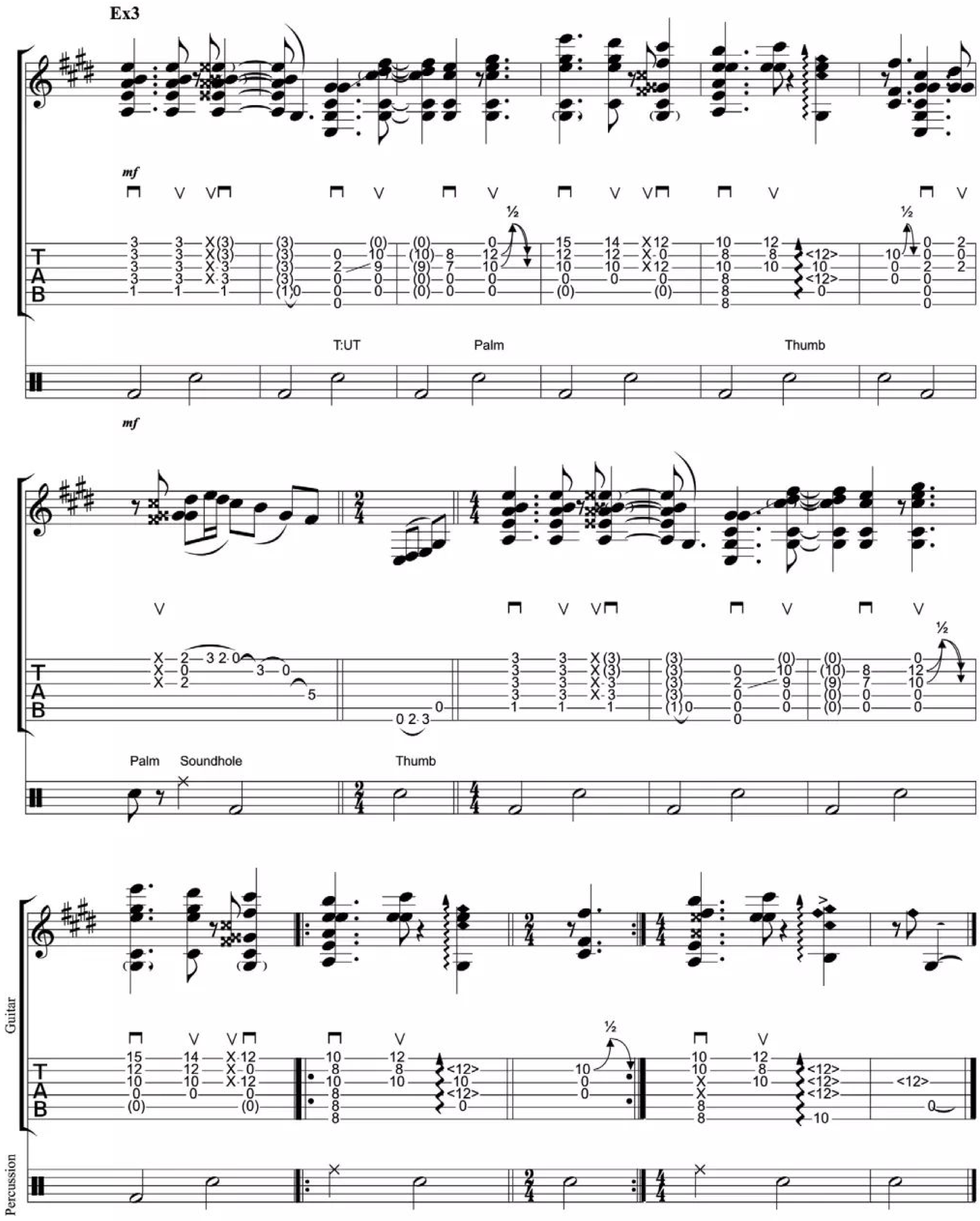
> **"Here I play a variety of interesting strummed chords over a 3/4 polyrhythm in the percussion"**

EXAMPLE 3



multiple strings are 'tapped' at the same time, something that is much harder in standard tuning. I am also reintroducing the percussion stave with some thumb strikes on the bottom string, plus heavy palm slaps on the end of the fingerboard.

Structurally, the piece now returns to the theme we covered in the previous 'Overload' column, so in the interest of space saving we will move to the prechorus – **example 3.**

This is a really fun section of the song where I play a variety of interesting strummed chords over a 3/4 polyrhythm in the percussion. The majority of hits are from the bass drum (heel of hand on the top) and the aforementioned palm strike, which I sometimes embellish with thumb strikes on the top while the fingers strum the strings. You can see an example of this in the second bar with the 'T:UT' annotation, or 'Thumb: Upper Top'. Watch out for the sneaky bar of 2/4!

In the next issue we'll be taking a detailed look at the chorus, where multiple layers are being played simultaneously. We will also be looking at the first section of the piece that makes use of digital delay, this adds a swirling ethereal dynamic to the track, which you can hear an example of at 1'40" in the YouTube version. We all love the acoustic guitar but it sure is nice to play with toys sometimes.

Best of luck with these dots, and remember to check out the song on YouTube for visual assistance. ■

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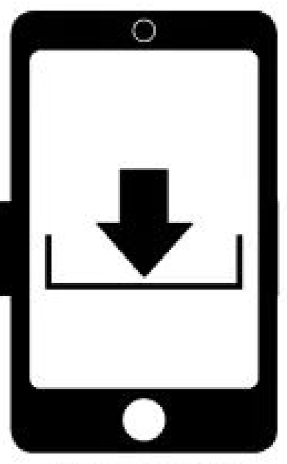
ALBÉNIZ'S 'SONATA'



Ray takes us through a lesser-known 'Sonata' from Spanish priest Albéniz

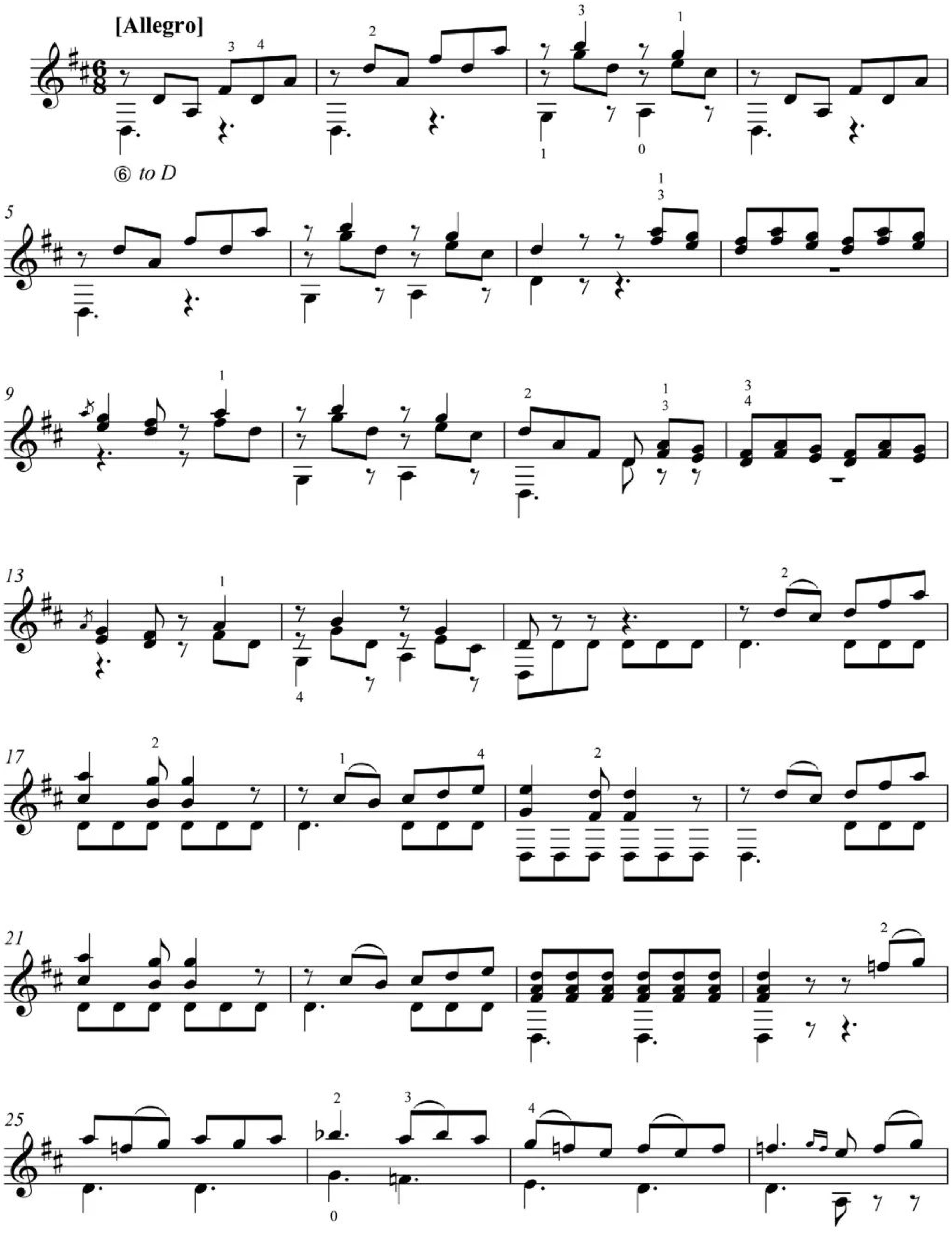
TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

The name Isaac Albéniz is well known to guitarists through his works for piano, many of which arrange very effectively for the guitar. However, Mateo Albéniz, or to give him his full name, Mateo Antonio Pérez de Albéniz, is no relation. Little is known about his life other than it seems he was born in 1755 in Spain and was both a priest and a composer of masses, motets, vespers and music for keyboard. The date of his death is uncertain – some sources give it as 1821, others as 1831 – and the majority of his music was never published.

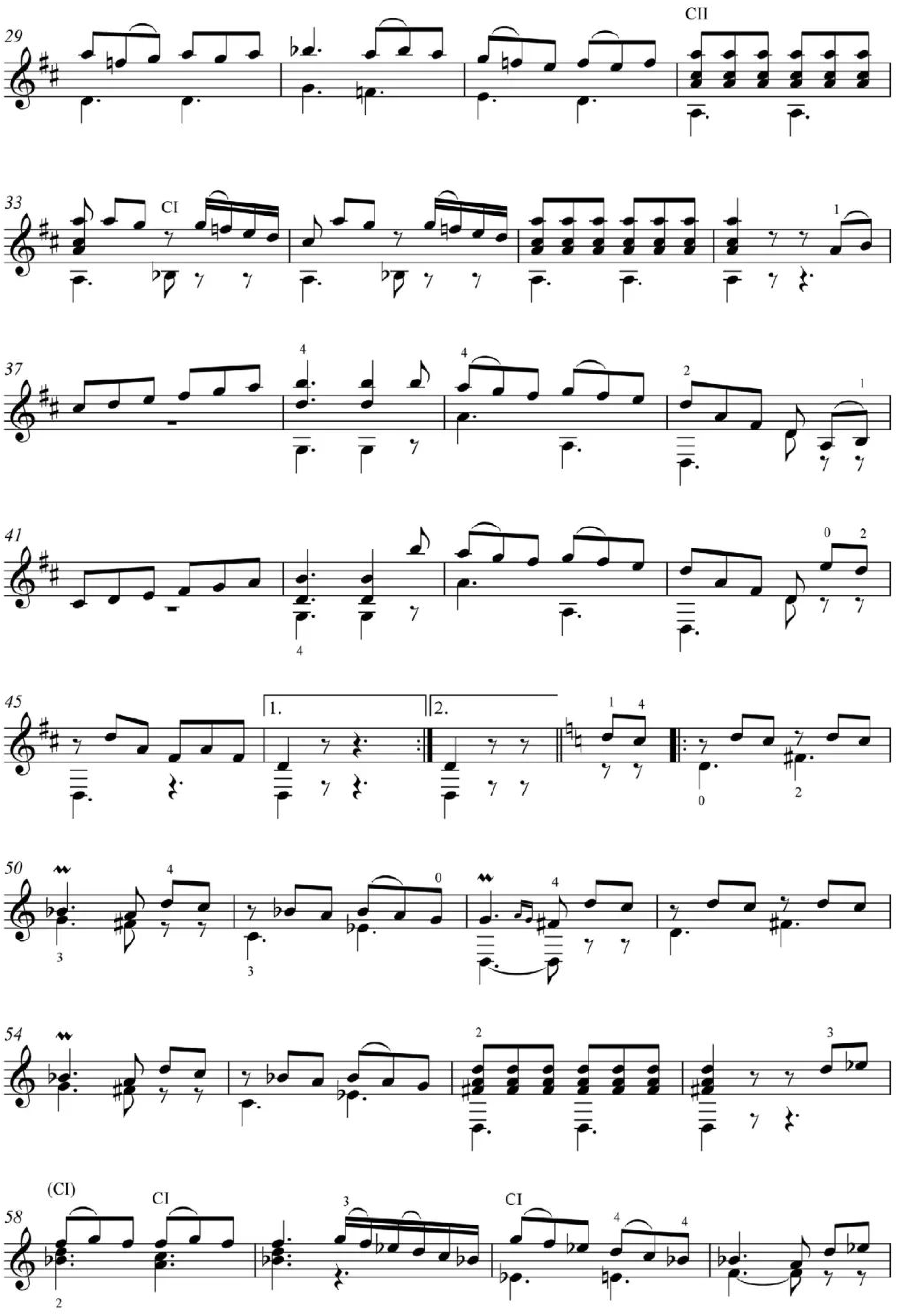
Mateo Albéniz's 'Sonata' was written for harpsichord. I first became aware of the piece many years ago when I heard it played by Julian Bream on the RCA Victor LP *The Art of Julian Bream*. The arrangement (in the original key of E major) was by the Spanish guitarist and musicologist Emilio Pujol and is still available, published by Ricordi. In 1970 John Williams recorded his own arrangement of the piece – it appeared on a CBS LP *John Williams Plays Spanish Music*. The arrangement, in the more resonant key of D, was never published. My arrangement, also in D, is closer to Williams than Pujol, and while the Pujol arrangement is more faithful to the composer's original, I think the current version lies more comfortably on the instrument.

So is it an arrangement or a transcription? I've always thought of a transcription as being a note for note transference from one instrument to another. An arrangement can be freer, as is the case here. Had Albéniz written his 'Sonata' for guitar how would it have sounded? The keyboard original is available on the internet so I won't waste column space detailing the many amendments.

'SONATA' – ALBÉNIZ



"This arrangement is closer to Williams than Pujol, and while the Pujol arrangement is more faithful to the composer's original, I think this version lies more comfortably on the instrument"



The original version of the piece had no tempo indication; I have added *allegro* and my suggestion would be somewhere in the region of dotted crotchet = 130. Most of the piece should be playable at this tempo, although the semiquaver passages in bars 33, 34, 55, 63 and elsewhere might ultimately be the deciding factor.

Dynamics are not shown and wide contrasts in performance should be avoided. In bar three the left hand shift from the first half of the bar to the second can be quite tricky and inaccurate. There are two possible solutions: re-finger the passage, keeping the fourth finger on the G and playing an open E; alternatively finger it as shown, but instead of using the tip of the first finger, use the base, which means a lot less movement for the first finger. The small note A (grace note) in bar nine, and elsewhere, is an *acciaccatura* (which literally means 'crushed-in'). This means that the note is played simultaneously with the lower note E and immediately slurred to the G. In theory the A has no time value, although in practice it must, of course, however short. On the other hand, the grace notes in bar 28 are played before the beat. The sign above the notes in bars 50 and 52 indicates a mordent, just one of many ornamentation symbols that can be encountered in music from this period. The execution of these can vary enormously depending on such factors as tempo and personal taste. For the embellishment in bar 50 I suggest performing it as follows: play the printed G together with C (the note above the printed B flat in the scale) and slur as quickly as possible to the B flat and then repeat: C, B flat, C, B flat. One thing to bear in mind is that ornaments never disrupt the rhythm.

It would be interesting to see other pieces from this composer, but that seems highly unlikely. Composers from the period writing in a similar style are Cimarosa, Soler and Scarlatti, and works by these composers have already been arranged very successfully for the guitar. ■

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Paul Brett shows us that there are still plenty of chances to pick up bargains in today's vintage guitar market

COLLECTORS' CORNER

I get quite a few emails from people who are looking to build a guitar collection asking for advice on exactly what to collect.

Like all collecting, it is certainly not an exact science and it depends on many factors, including luck. When I started way back in the 1960s things were different to how they are now. Lots of today's collectable items, especially in the electric market, were new in the 60s, so there was no comparable collectable market.

Old guitars back then were looked upon as antiques and were embedded in earlier centuries. The growth of the modern music genres, and of course the demand and development in instruments, led to today's wide interest in guitars across the ages. If you are starting to build your own collection, make sure you can afford to partake and be prepared to hang onto what you buy for a few years. It's true that it has become more difficult to find bargains recently, as lots of people are looking for vintage gems. The acoustic market is less volatile than the electric one, so bear that in mind too.

Areas where you can source vintage are: specialised retail outlets, websites such as eBay, auctions and via private sellers. International purchases, say from the States, tend to be cheaper at source but as I've mentioned before, postal charges, VAT and import duty can whack the final price up. eBay can still provide some bargains but you have to be careful of seller descriptions. I've seen lots of 20s/30s guitars described at Oscar Schmidt Stellas, when in fact they were Regal or other makes. With electric guitars, authenticity is less exact as lots of changes can occur and fakes can disappoint. Always check the electronics and pots if you can, as old bodies can be rewired with new electrics.

Auctions too can provide some good bargains, but you have to account for the auctioneer's fees and VAT on top of the hammer price. I rarely look at the specialist guitar auctions and tend to go for the general auctions, most of which are listed online. Recently, I got a JJ six-string, one of 12-string blues legend Johnny Joyce's designs released by Aria in the mid 1970s, with an original case. They generally sell at retail for around the £500-£600 mark.

"IF YOU'RE STARTING TO BUILD YOUR OWN COLLECTION, MAKE SURE YOU CAN AFFORD TO PARTAKE AND BE PREPARED TO HANG ON TO WHAT YOU BUY FOR A FEW YEARS"

The one I got was £150 with a 15 per cent buyer's fee and VAT on top. So, for around the £200 mark, I consider that a bargain – plus it sounds and plays great. I've also bought a couple of nylon-strung acoustics – one from the 30s and the other from the 40s – for less than £100. Both are in excellent condition and play well.

Private sellers can often be a good place to source vintage guitars, and when dealing on a one-to-one basis you can often negotiate a more favourable price and try before you buy in some cases.

I've been doing some National Guitar Shows for Vintage Guitars recently and there are a few vintage sellers among the throng, so that can also be a good source of discovery. Remember that you also have to invest the time to peruse and research the market – gems don't fall into your lap on a regular basis.

Look also for what I term as the 'oddball' guitars: one-off guitars or guitars that may be on the fringe of creeping into the collector's sights. As an example, a few years ago you could source 50s and 60s electric Silvertones and Harmonys for a few hundred dollars. Now, some are selling for up to $2000. Quite a jump, but then they are historically linked to musical trends and players who used such guitars as their first instruments.

Like all forms of collecting, it can fall into the anorak category as it's not a general topic you could bring up with your mates in the pub, but it is enjoyable to see your collection grow and increase in value. Outside of the fiscal benefits you also have the satisfaction of playing and recoding these older gems and preserving them for future generations to enjoy.

I guess the best bargain I picked up over the last few years was an archtop round-hole Gibson L4 from 1930. I found it in a private general barn sale in great condition and with its case. It retails around the £2500 mark and I got it for £150. So there are still some bargains out there.

Recently I have been looking at other areas of stringed instruments as I am seeking to improve my historical timeline in this genre. The earliest one recorded was from 3500BC and found in Egypt. The mummified body of musician Har Mose was discovered with a three-string tanbur, complete with a wooden pick. So the concept of a musician playing a stringed instrument goes way, way back into ancient history.

Probably the main instrument the guitar (as we know it) was derived from is the oud, brought into southern Europe by the Moors and introduced into western Europe by the Knights Templar, returning from the Crusades. Ouds can have simple attributes or fabulous artistic embellishments. I managed to get a handmade one that falls into the latter category, which I am currently restringing.

If I can leave you with one tip, it's this: if you spot a Kalamazoo KG-14 or a Gibson L1 from the late 20s or early 30s, it's worth investing as they are still reasonable in price and both are guitars the main bluesman Robert Johnson was photographed playing. These have been steadily rising in price for years and will continue to do so because of the Johnson connection. Good hunting! ■

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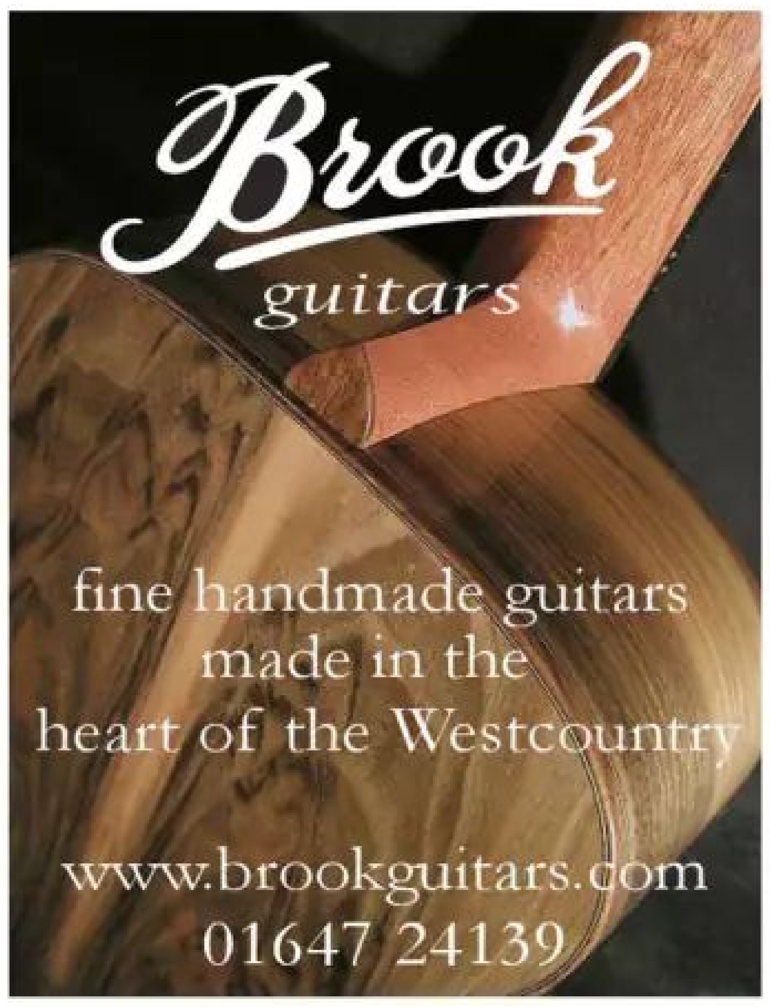

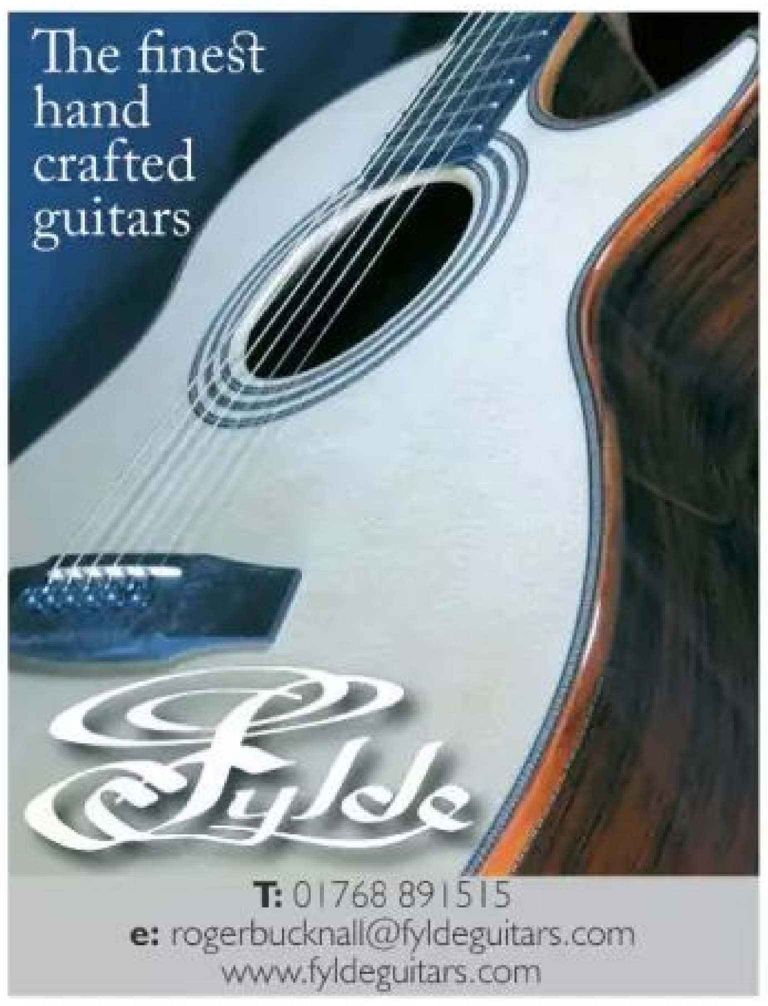

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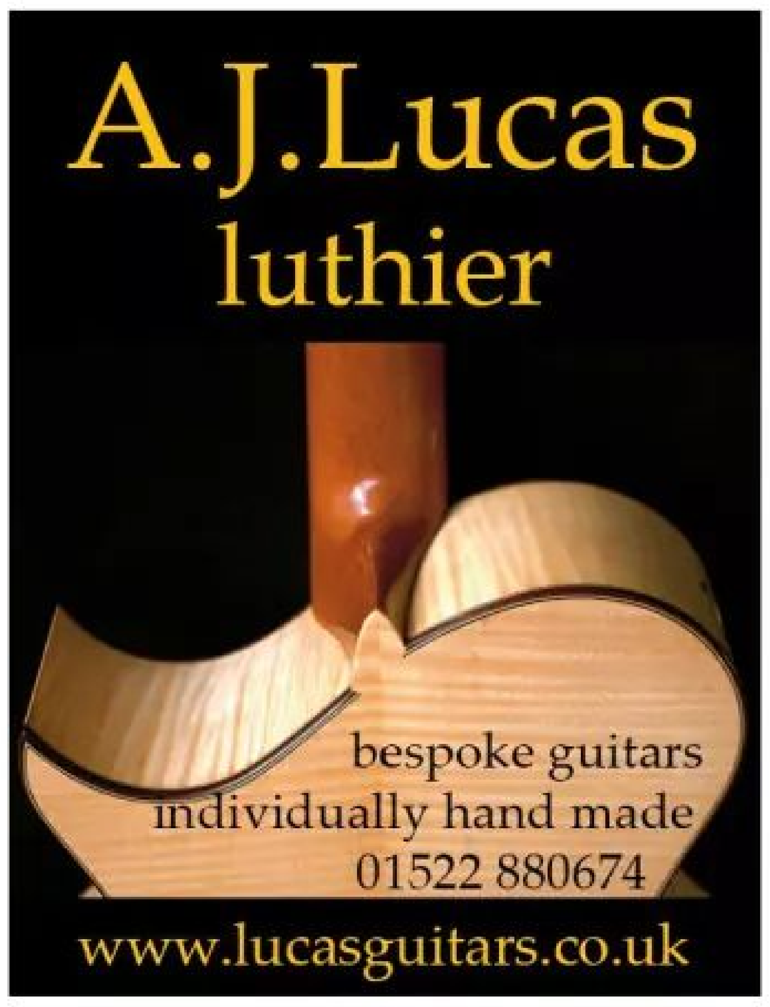

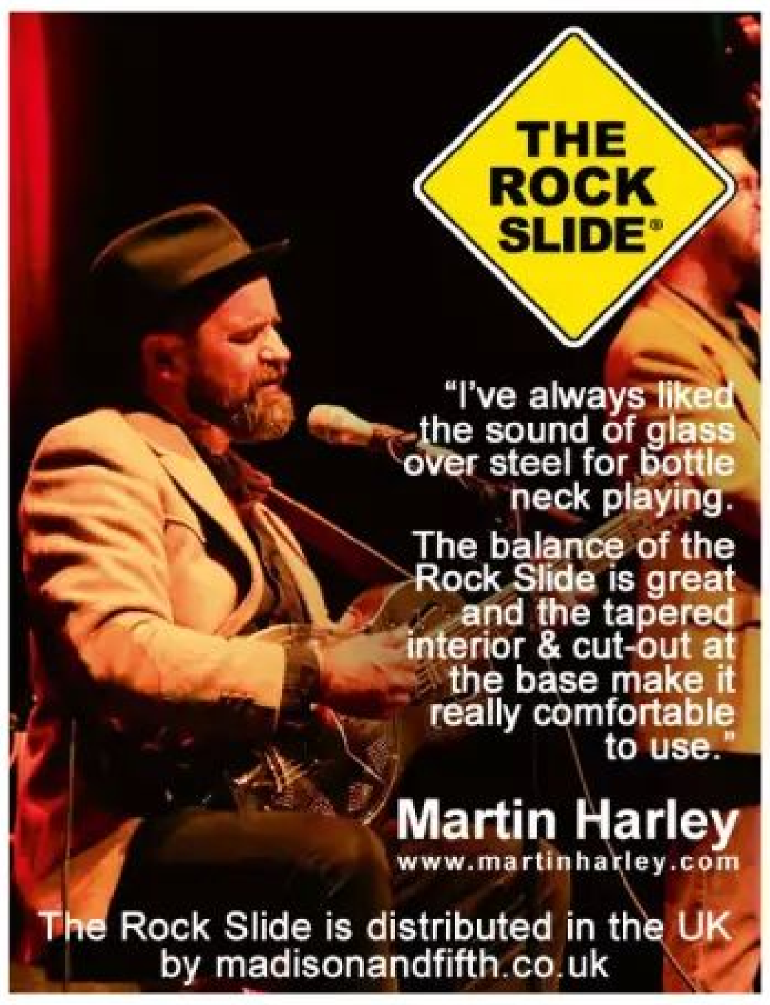

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JHS....25
Logjam....13
Lowden....2
Marshall....19
Musicians Union....57
National Resophonic....3
Osborne Guitars....57
Paul Brett....83
Proel....59
Promenade Music....51
Replay Acoustics....57
Rockschool....53
Rotosound....77
Santa Cruz....65
Standby Guitars....25
Strings and Things....108
Taylor Guitars....23
The Acoustic Centre....73
Westside....4
Yamaha....81

A FUNNY NOTE

Andy Pritchard realises it's better late than never to introduce himself

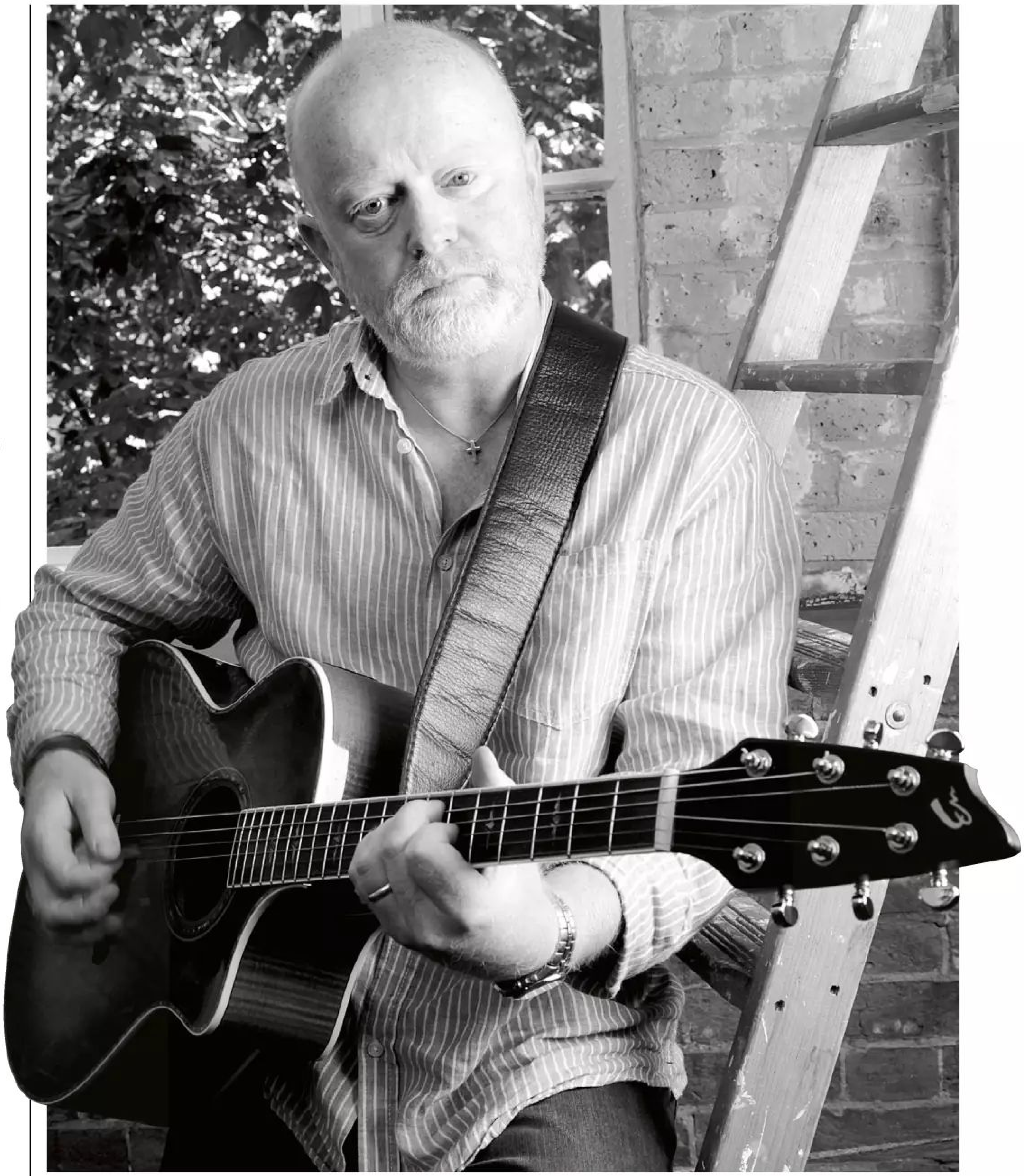
It occurs to me that having written my two previous articles for this esteemed publication I have failed to, in any way, introduce myself – shocking manners I know. So to correct this oversight I thought I'd tell you a bit about me.

My name is Andy Pritchard, aka Pilch, and I have existed in the shallows (or the depths, depending on which way you look at it) of the music business for over 40 years. If you were to view the industry as a huge tropical fish tank, the stars would be the Fan Tailed Guppies or Angel fish, startling and magnificent but mostly short-lived. But look at the tank for a while and you would begin to notice movement down the bottom. In among the reeds and stones, feeding on the detritus of those above, not brightly coloured but long lived and essential to the ecosystem of the tank, a bottom muncher. Gently patrolling the lower reaches, living off the unwanted food and excrement of the those darting around in the bright lights and bubbles, making the occasional foray upwards to see what all the fuss is about before sinking back to the gravel and anonymity.

Yes I'm afraid that is me. In a career that has left the great stadia of the world untroubled, I made my bones in the pubs and clubs of the capital and, apart from probably three or four occasions when defeat has somehow been snatched from the jaws of victory, that has been where you will most likely find me.

As with all musical journeys there have, of course, been many excursions into other areas, or tanks to keep the metaphor going, including musical theatre, about which I'm sure I'll write in the future. But these days, when not embroiled in corporate gigs and fundraisers with the Impossible Groovers, you'll find me singing my tunes with comrades of a similar vintage as Pilch and the Midnight Tinklers.

The thing is it all started so well. As a 12 year old, walking the corridors of my school one lunchtime, I stumbled into an audition that was to change things forever. The English National Opera, which I think was still called Sadlers Wells then, had come looking for urchins to perform in their upcoming production off *La Bohème*. Being something of a natural when it came to all things urchin I was duly selected and before too long found myself on the opening night at the Coliseum in Leicester Square singing my head off in front of 2,300 people. Having been severely bitten by the performing bug it would, alas, appear that I peaked far too soon, with the graph heading mostly downwards ever since. I guess the low point was some five years ago when I found myself doing a solo acoustic gig in the upstairs room of the White Hart, a pub in the Mile End Road opposite the notorious Blind Beggar. An engaging space of somewhat faded glory, I found myself performing to two couples and a dog. If I'm honest I don't think the dog was listening, and the couples seemed to have other things on their mind given the encouragement of the shabby sofas and soft candlelight. But bizarrely, in that moment I arrived at a kind of musical Eden. Gazing into the single spotlight loosely suspended with the aid of gaffer tape three feet from my face I found myself dredging deep from the emotional barrel giving the songs everything I had. It was as if there was some kind of musical purity to be drawn from the situation, where you end up doing it for the sake of the music alone. I know you're thinking: 'He's really lost it now', but I would encourage you to question yourself on where you motivation to perform comes from.



This kind of inward reflection can only be truly successful when accompanied by a couple of noble ales preferably in the company of similar minded folk, probably when listening to some bloke singing his heart out. ■

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